إنجليزي

Discovering ISLAM

إكتشف الإسلام

SAYED MOUSTAFA AL-QAZWINI

Discovering ISLAM



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This book is dedicated to the master of all women
from the beginning of creation to the end,

Fatima al-Zahra
(peace be upon her),

beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah (*pbuh&hf*),
as we await her intercession on the final day.

PREFACE

As of June, 1999, I will have lived in The United States for five years. During this time, I have met many intellectual individuals who have inspired me to introduce the beautiful religion of Islam to the public through speeches, writings, and articles. I also have had the honor of spending almost three years with our future generation, the Muslim youth, in Southern California and other parts of the United States. The more time I spent discussing and debating aspects of Islam with the youths, the more I was convinced of the necessity to put the basic ideas of Islam on paper and introduce Islam to the ever-increasing number of people who seek to discover Allah's final revelation to humankind. Through my work as a scholar and as a preacher of Islam in the West, I realized that the Islamic centers and institutions have been inadequate and inefficient in the field of *da'wah* (the invitation to Islam). Although many valuable works have been generated in this area, Islamic literature is still too sparse and insufficient in addressing the simplicity of Islam—the belief in one God to non-Muslims. Therefore, I decided to contribute, according to my ability to do my share in spreading the word of Allah, a duty incumbent upon all Muslims. I hope Allah will accept my humble effort.

I would like to thank Sister Amina Inloes for her help with editing this work.

May Allah continuously guide me and all the sincere brothers and sisters to His righteousness and piety.

Sayed Moustafa Al-Qazwini
Orange County, California
May 6, 1999

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When the first edition of this book was published in August of 1999, I received many words of encouragement and inspiration from people within the community. In recent years, the need for approachable Islamic publications has been recognized in order to clarify the misconceptions surrounding Islam. Remarkably, within two years, three thousand copies of the first edition of this book have been distributed. Thus, the thought of reissuing the book surfaced. Yet, as a man begins to age, his approach to ideas and conceptions evolves. I felt the book warranted a review and revision. With Allah's grace, this text reflects that intention.

The writing and publishing of this book would not have been achieved without Allah the Almighty and the assistance of many dedicated people within our community. Special thanks goes to Sister Fatma Saleh for her tremendous work in assisting with the second edition. A deep appreciation and prayer goes to the Sajjad Foundation and its Trustees for making this book available to readers. May Allah bless the aforementioned names and all of the faithful people who spread the light of Islam.

Sayed Moustafa Al-Qazwini
Orange County, California.
July 13, 2001.

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It is customary in Islam that when the names of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, other prophets, or imams (descendants and successors of Prophet Muhammad) are enunciated, the following phrases are mentioned:

Allah—*"Glorified and Exalted"*
(Sabhanna wa-tallah).
Written abbreviation—*SWT.*

Prophet Muhammad—*"Peace be upon him and his family."*
Written abbreviation—*pbuh&hf.*

After the names of other prophets, imams from the family of Prophet Muhammad and his daughter—*"Peace be upon him/her."*
Written abbreviation—*pbuh.*

With great respect, admiration, recognition, and praise, I have omitted the mentioned phrases for the sake of continuity.

WHAT IS ISLAM?

Islam[1] means "submitting or surrendering one's will to the will of Allah."[2] Humankind's innate disposition naturally submits to the reverence of Allah; this instinct was born with him or her on the day of creation. In reality, the entire universe, through its ordered workings, all submit to the will of Allah. Modern science calls these phenomena "the laws of nature," but these laws of nature, from an Islamic perspective, are not just any laws of nature but the laws of Allah for nature. Human beings depend on, and are in need of Allah's sustenance and guidance throughout their entire lives; thus, man must yield his self-will and desires to the will of the Creator.

Submission to Allah does not entail self-humiliation or a denial of human intellect; rather, it means trusting the knowledge, wisdom, and fairness of the Creator. In some form of an act or instance, people involuntary trust and depend on the safety of their lives to others. Hence, the decision to trust a person with more knowledge is logical; therefore, trusting the wisdom of Allah would not constitute abandoning one's intellect, but, rather, it would constitute following one's natural inclination.

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[1] From the Arabic verb *aslama*, meaning surrender.
[2] The Arabic word for Allah.

Islam has other meanings; one of which is "to have peace." Allah says in the Quran,[3] **"He is Allah, there is no Allah but Him—the King, the Holy One, and the Peace"** (59:23). Moreover, the Quran states, **"And Allah invites to the abode of peace"** (10:25).

By its connotations of peace and safety, Islam indicates that the religion is free from any deficiencies or defects. As a religion, Islam is considered *perfect* because it was ordained by Allah and not invented or marked by humankind.

Commanded by Allah, Prophet Abraham was the first person to use the words *Islam* and *Muslims*.[4] The Quran states, **"It [Islamic monotheism] is the religion of your father Abraham. He [Allah] has named you Muslims both before and in this [Quran]"**(22:78). **"Abraham was neither a Jew, nor a Christian, but he was a true Muslim [submissive to Allah] and was not one of the polytheists"** (3:67). Not only did Prophet Abraham call his religion Islam, but the prophets after Abraham called their religion Islam. Prophet Joseph, in the chapter entitled **"Joseph"** of the Quran states:

> **My Lord! You have given me authority and taught me the interpretation of things. O Creator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die as a Muslim, submitting to Your will, and join me with the righteous** (12:101).

Thus, Allah declares in the Quran, **"Truly the religion before Allah is Islam"** (3:19).

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[3] Quran: Islam's divine book.
[4] Muslim refers to a follower of the religion of Islam.

WHO ARE THE MUSLIMS?

Muslims are the followers of the religion of Islam (those people who submit to the will of Allah as explained in the Quran and the traditions[5] of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam). Today, the Muslim population is about 1.2 billion, and it is spread over a vast range of races, nationalities, and cultures. Approximately 18% of the Muslims live in the Arab world, but the majority live in Asia and Africa. The largest Muslim population is in Indonesia, and a significant number of Muslim minorities exist in Russia, China, and Europe, North America and South America. The Muslim population in the United States is estimated to be around six million and growing.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A MUSLIM?

The basic requirement to become a Muslim is to declare, "*Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah.*" In English this means "I testify that there is no Allah, but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." Anyone who proclaims this phrase joins the ranks of the Muslim nation. The statement marks the beginning of one's

[5] Hadiths, Sunnah, or traditions are actions, words, and consents of Prophet Muhammad in matters pertaining to the meaning and practices of Islam which have been transmitted through a line of narrators.

physical and spiritual journey in practicing all aspects of Islam. A Muslim strives to become one whom the Quran terms as the *faithful* (*mu'min*). Although this journey in becoming faithful may be long, its rewards are numerous for those who embark on it with sincere will and intention.

Practicing Islam requires learning Islamic ideas, teachings, and practices—then, adapting to them. Moreover, Islamic practice requires some sacrifice. However, the necessity of sacrifice should not be a deterrent. Prophet Muhammad states, *"Whenever someone gives up something for the sake of Allah, Allah will replace it with something better."*

Sincerity of belief also develops over time. When Prophet Muhammad began spreading the message of Islam, some people came to him and informed him that they were believers in Islam. In replying, Allah revealed the following verse, **"Say [Muhammad]: 'You believe not,' but say, 'We have submitted to Islam,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts"** (49:14).

The successor to Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali,[6] has described the dynamic process of following Islam:

> *I am defining Islam as no one has defined it before me: Islam is submission, submission is conviction, conviction is affirmation, affirmation is acknowledgement, acknowledgement is performance of obligations, and the performance of obligations is good deeds.*[7]

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[6] Imam Ali, was Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Since the age of six, Imam Ali was raised and educated by the Prophet.
[7] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #125.

PILLARS OF ISLAM
~ ISLAMIC BELIEFS ~

I
THE ONENESS OF ALLAH (*TAWHID*)

Allah is the center of a Muslim's belief. Whereas certain religions focus on individuals, for example, Christianity's focus on Jesus Christ, Islam focuses solely on Allah. Islam is based on the Absolute (Allah), not His manifestations. The Quran itself speaks of the oneness of Allah:

> **Allah has borne witness that there is no Allah but Him, and the angels, and those with knowledge also witness this. He is always standing firm on justice. There is no Allah but Him, the Mighty, the Wise** (3:18).

The oneness of Allah is not only a philosophical argument, but also an affirmation in which all human beings once declared the oneness of Allah before their souls entered the body:

> **[Remember] when your Lord brought forth the children of Adam from their loins and made them testify over themselves, saying, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes! We testify," lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this"** (7:172).

At that time, every person to be created proclaimed Allah's majesty, sovereignty, power, transcendence, and absolute oneness. Such was the covenant Allah made with all people at the time of their creation, whether people presently claim to believe in Allah or not. Similarly, all people today, regardless of origin, are naturally inclined toward the idea that Allah is one and without a partner. The Quran informs Prophet Muhammad of the following:

> **Set your face to the true religion [Islamic monotheism], the natural inclination [*fitra*] with which Allah has created mankind. [Let there be] no change in what Allah has made; that is the straight religion, but most people do not understand** (30:30).

DESCRIBING ALLAH

One of the shortest chapters in the Quran, **"The Oneness of Allah,"**[8] summarizes the nature of Allah in five verses:

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[8] *Al-tawhid*, c.112.

In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful: Say, He is Allah, the One Allah, the Eternal Originator, He does not bear children, nor was He born and He is beyond compare.

The most fundamental Islamic teachings about Allah are contained in previous verses; there is only one Allah, He is eternal, unique, and has no kinship, creator, or resemblance to any human being. Prophets have stated some of the divine attributes of Allah. Prophet Abraham said, **"My Lord is He who gives life and causes death"** (2:258). When confronting Pharaoh, Moses said, **"Our Lord is He Who gave each thing its form and nature then guided it aright"** (20:50). The two verses describe Allah in His relation to human beings; however, Allah's being extends far beyond His relation to humankind. Imam Ali described Allah in the following manner:

> *He who assigns to Him different conditions does not believe in His oneness, nor does he who likens Him grasp His reality. He who illustrates Him does not signify Him; he who points at Him and imagines Him does not mean Him. Everything that is known through itself has been created, and everything that exists by virtue of other things is the effect of a cause. He works but, not with the help of instruments; He fixes measures, but not with the activities of thinking; He is rich, but not by acquisition. Time does not keep company with Him, and implements do not help Him. His being precedes time, His existence precedes non-existence, and His eternity precedes beginning. By His creating the senses, it is known that He has no*

> *senses. By the contraries in various matters, it is known that He has no contrary, and by the similarity between things it is known that there is nothing similar to Him. He has made light the contrary of darkness, brightness that of gloom, dryness that of moisture, and heat that of cold. He produces affection among inimical things...He is not confined by limits nor counted by numbers. Material parts can surround things of their own kind, and organs can point out things similar to themselves...Through them, the Creator manifests Himself to the intelligence, and through them He is guarded from the sight of the eyes...He has not begotten anyone lest He be regarded as having been born. He has not been begotten; otherwise, He would be contained within limits. He is too high to have sons...Understanding cannot think of Him so as to give Him shape...*[9]

Allah expresses His own eternity and perpetuity in the Quran when He states that, **"Every thing on earth shall perish, but the face of Allah will remain, full of majesty and honor"** (55:26-27).

NINETY-NINE NAMES OF ALLAH

[9] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon #186. One of the greatest written compositions in Islam, complied by Al-Sharif Al-Radi (420 AH [Al-Higra] 972CE).

The Quran states, "**And to Allah belong the most beautiful names, so call on Him by them**" (7:180). Islamic tradition states that Allah has many different names representing different aspects of His being; ninety-nine are known commonly among Muslims.

English	Arabic
The Beneficent	*ar-rahmaan*
The Merciful	*ar-rahim*
The Sovereign	*al-malik*
The Holy	*al-quddus*
The Peace	*as-salaam*
The Protector	*al-muhaymin*
The Mighty	*al-'aziz*
The Compeller	*al-jabbar*
The Majestic	*al-mutakabbir*
The Creator	*al-khaaliq*
The Evolver	*al-baari'*
The Fashioner	*al-musawwir*
The Forgiver	*al-ghaffar*
The Subduer	*al-qahhar*
The Bestower	*al-wahhab*
The Provider	*ar-razzaq*
The Opener	*al-fattah*
The Knowing	*al-alim*
The Constrictor	*al-qaabid*
The Expander	*al-baasit*
The Abaser	*al-khaafid*
The Wise	*al-hakim*
The Glorious	*al-majid*
The Exalter	*ar-raafi'*
The Honorer	*al-mu'izz*
The Dishonorer	*al-mudhill*
The Hearing	*as-sami*

English	Arabic
The Great	*al-'azim*
The All-Forgiving	*al-ghafur*
The Appreciative	*ash-shakur*
The High	*al-aliy*
The Immense	*al-kabir*
The Preserver	*al-hafiz*
The Maintainer	*al-muqit*
The Reckoner	*al-hasib*
The Majestic	*al-jalil*
The Generous	*al-karim*
The Watchful	*ar-raqib*
The Responsive	*al-mujib*
The Loving	*al-wadud*
The Strong	*aqawi*
The Firm	*almatin*
The Truth	*al-haqq*
The Trustee	*al-wakil*
The Guardian	*al-wali*
The Praiseworthy	*al-hamid*
The Enumerator	*al-muhsi*
The Originator	*al-mubdi*
The Restorer	*al-mu'id*
The Giver of Life	*al-muhyi*
The Living	*al-hayy*
The Finder	*al-waajid*
The Seeing	*al-basir*
The Judge	*al-hakam*
The Able	*al-qadir*

The Noble	*al-maajid*
The Unique	*al-waahid*
The One	*al-ahad*
The Eternal	*as-samad*
The Guide	*al-haadi*
The Powerful	*al-muqtadir*
The Expediter	*al-muqaddim*
The Delayer	*al-mu'akhkhir*
The Manifest	*az-zaahir*
The Equitable	*al-muqsit*
The Exalted	*al-mutaAli*
The Avenger	*al-muntaqim*
The Pardoner	*al-'afuw*
The Compassionate	*ar-ra'uf*
The Patient	*as-sabur*
The Gatherer	*al-jaami'*
The Self-Sufficient	*al-ghani*
The Enricher	*al-mughni*
The Preventer	*al-mani'*
The Distresser	*ad-darr*
The Incomparable	*al-badi'*
The Everlasting	*al-baaqi*
The Inheritor	*al-waarith*
The First	*al-awwal*
The Last	*al-aakhir*
The Hidden	*al-baatin*
The Governor	*al-waali*
The Resurrector	*al-baa'ith*
The Witness	*ash-shahid*
The Aware	*al-khabir*
The Kind	*al-halim*
The Benefitor	*an-naafi'*
The Light	*an-nur*
The Just	*al-'adl*
The Subtle	*al-latif*
The Lord of Majesty and Bounty	*dhul jalaali wal-ikraam*
The Acceptor of Repentance	*at-tawwab*
The Guide to the Right Path	*ar-rashid*
The Owner of Sovereignty	*maalik al-mulk*
The Source of Goodness	*al-barr*
The Creator of Death	*al-mumit*
The All-Surrounding	*al-waasi*

VIEWPOINTS OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY REGARDING ALLAH

The emergence of Islam returned Abrahamic monotheism to its original purity. Islam perceives the doctrine of trinity and

incarnation as a veil cast upon the complete reality of divine unity. Nothing should compromise divine unity. Allah is the absolute, the one without condition, and above all relations. The distinguishable feature of Islamic faith from other monotheistic religions is its insistence on absolute monotheism. Islam entirely opposes any association concerning Allah. This includes the exclusion of the idea that Jesus, the Messenger of Allah, was Allah himself. Allah states in the Quran:

> **It is not for a man, that Allah should give him [Jesus] the Book [Gospel], and Judgment, and apostleship, and yet he [Jesus] should say to people, "Be ye worshippers of me, besides Allah's," but rather [he would say] "Be ye Allah what ye teach the Book and what ye read [yourselves]** (3:79).[10]

Muslims believe that Jesus was a human prophet and divinely inspired by Allah. However, Jesus is considered to be a servant and conveyer of Allah's message. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament mentions that Jesus was the son of Allah. Barbara Brown, a contemporary American scholar, supports this idea with the following statement:

> The doctrine of divinity states that Jesus is the Son of Allah, the Word of Allah made flesh. Even though Jesus himself never claimed to be divine, Paul gave him this attribute for one reason —to gain converts among the Gentiles. The Gentiles were pagans who were used to worshipping Allah's [gods] that had wonderful legends and myths

[10] Also see Quran 5:72-75.

behind them. Several of the pagan deities of the time such as Mithras, Adonis, Attis, and Osiris were all the offspring of a supreme ruling Allah, and each had died a violent death at a young age, coming back to life a short time later in order to save their people. Paul took this into account, giving the pagans something similar in Christianity. He attributed divinity to Jesus, saying he was the Son of Allah, the Supreme, and that he too had died for their sins. In doing so, Paul compromised the teaching of Jesus with pagan beliefs in order to make Christianity more acceptable to the Gentiles.

The term "son of Allah" was not something new. However, it had been used in the Old Testament to refer to David (Saul 2:7) and his son Solomon (I Chronicles 22:100) and to refer to Adam (Luke 3:38) in the New Testament. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, detailed in Matthew 5, Jesus tells his listeners, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of Allah." In all cases, the term "son of Allah" was not meant to be applied literally but to signify love and affection from Allah to the righteous. "Son of Allah" means a special closeness to Allah, not to be of Allah. After all, people are sons of Allah, and Allah is the creator of all life.[11]

Christians who lived during the time of Jesus believed that Jesus was a divine messenger, guiding and bringing them the words of Allah. However, after the ascension of Jesus to heaven, Saint Paul, who was deeply influenced by Roman paganism, wanted his preaching of Christianity to be more

[11] Barbara Brown, *A Closer Look at Christianity.*

appealing to the Gentiles; thus, he compromised the teachings of Jesus by adopting certain pagan ideas and interpolating them into Christianity. Even though it was not part of the original teachings of Jesus, the idea of the trinity spread.



II
DIVINE JUSTICE (*'ADIL*)

Anyone who believes in Islamic monotheism must also believe in Allah's justice. Allah is just, and He never wrongs. Moreover, He does not have a cause for injustice toward His creatures, for an injustice is an immoral action; and Allah is incapable of evil. Allah is omniscient and never neglects any matter. Allah is self-sufficient, and, He is not in need of the help of people. Allah is the possessor of everything, and His wisdom transcends the universe. For example, the Quran states:

"He is always standing firm on justice. There is no Allah but Him, the Mighty, the Wise" (3:18).

"And your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone" (18:49).

"We[12] did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves" (16:118).

Just as Allah encourages human beings to emulate some of His attributes, such as being *patient* and *forgiving*, Allah also requires humankind to follow the way of justice. For example, the Quran states, **"Say: 'My Lord has enjoined upon me justice'"**(7:29).

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12 "We" refers to Allah. Sometimes "We" is used instead of "I" or "Allah" in the Quran to refer to Allah.

Although people may falter in the way of justice, none of Allah's prophets or their successors have ever committed acts of injustice.

Allah's justice embraces the entire universe. Whoever ponders the existence of the universe and the order therein will not only observe the expansion of Allah's justice over His entire creation, but also each of the creations become apparent in all aspects of nature, from the physical world to the biological world, and from the microcosms to the macrocosms. The justice of Allah is particularly visible in the destiny and free-will of human beings.

Although Allah's justice encompasses everything people should invoke upon Allah to treat them not with His justice, but rather with His mercy. If Allah had punished people immediately for all their sins, then humanity would have perished long ago.

PREDESTINATION (*JABIR*) OR FREE WILL (*TAWHID*)

The question of man's predestination or freedom of choice has preoccupied humankind throughout the ages, and it continues to be discussed by Islamic philosophers and scholars. Ultimately, two schools of thought regarding this question have emerged. One, called the Compulsionists, holds that human beings do not have the freedom of choice. Every decision, utterance, and action people make has already been predestined since the time of creation. Compulsionists believe that the faithful have no choice in their faith. Likewise, the unfaithful have no choice but to not believe in Allah. They maintain that everything is unalterable and predetermined.

The second school of thought, the Free Will, declares that human beings are masters of their own acts. This notion is in concordance with the Quran which states, **"None will be wronged in anything, nor will you be requited anything except that which you used to do"** (36:54). In addition to another verse from the Quran that states, **"The truth is from your Lord. So whomever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve"** (18:29). From these two verses, it can be concluded that human beings have the freedom to act, but they must bear the moral responsibilities and consequences of their actions. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of divine will itself makes people accept that their very actions are not predestined.

The beginning of guidance is always from Allah, but the beginning of man's destruction is one's erroneous choice. The Quran states, **"Whatever good reaches you is from Allah, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself"** (4:79).



III
PROPHETHOOD (*NUBUWWA*)

Prophets were people who received divine revelation. Since the inception of history, Allah sent numerous prophets and messengers to humankind. The prophet's messages were of two types: local and universal. While the local prophets were sent with specific messages to specific groups of people, the universal prophets were sent with messages and books for humankind. There were only five universal prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

A unique characteristic of all the prophets and messengers is that they were infallible. They committed no sins. To demonstrate the validity of this concept is to consider that humanity needed prophets and messengers to set an exemplary, structured lifestyle to emulate and follow. If they had committed errors, then people might be obliged to exemplify and excuse their errors making the prophets and messengers untrustworthy. Infallibility means protection from error in teaching doctrine on faith and morals. Infallibility is defined as the spiritual grace of Allah that enables a person to abstain from sins by his own free will. This power of infallibility and sinlessness does not make a person incapable of committing mistakes; rather, he or she refrains from transgression by his or her own power and will.

Infallibility is essential since the mission of the prophets and messengers was not only to convey divine scriptures from Allah, but also lead and guide humanity toward the right path. Therefore, prophets and messengers had to be role models and perfect examples for humanity. The mention of infallibility is stated thirteen times in the Quran. In the Quran, Allah said to Satan, **"Certainly you shall have no authority over My servants except those who follow you and go astray"** (15:42). Satan then said to Allah, **"By Your might, then I will surely mislead them all, except Your chosen servants among them [the messengers and *imams*]"** (38:82).

Prophet Muhammad never committed any sin and was never harsh to any person or animal. Allah said, **"And by the mercy of Allah you dealt with them [people] gently, and had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from you"** (3:158).

In most societies, people with questionable records of conduct would be ineligible from becoming presidential or gubernatorial candidates since they would be expected to lead society and set examples of righteousness and honesty. Unfortunately, many distorted stories and images about Allah's prophets exist. For example, stories in the present-day version of the Old Testament accuse Prophet David of adultery with Baathsheba, Prophet Noah of being drunk, Prophet Lot of having committed incest, and Prophet Moses of committing adultery with an Ethiopian woman. Islam adamantly opposes the unethical and immoral writings that have been attributed to the prophets of Allah.

However, the Quran does mention the errors of some prophets, such as the Divine commandment that forbade Adam from eating from the tree.[13] Nonetheless, the verses should not be literally

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[13] See Quran 20:115-123.

understood as Adam having committed a sin. Allegorical verses are common in the Quran.[14] Adam did not disobey the obligatory commands of Allah. The command that Adam did not honor was a recommended command; therefore, in Islamic law Adam cannot be considered as having committed a sin.

Allah preordained all the prophets; nonetheless, the prophets had to strive for prophecy. The foremost example of the vocational test that prophets had to endure is told in the life of Prophet Abraham, the father of all prophets. Abraham was born into an idolatrous society, but the purity of his nature recognized the worship of idols as insignificant, and he recognized that the idols were incapable of doing any harm or good. One day, when no one was present, Abraham smashed all of the idols, except for the largest statue. People began to question Abraham about the destruction of their Gods. Abraham's reply was for the people to question the remaining statue for the answer since they believed that their stone idols had power. Although the people were aware that their idols were indeed powerless, they did not know how to respond to the situation. Thus, out of embarrassment and anger, they cast Abraham into a colossal fire. However, Allah protected Abraham from the fire and confounded the plots of the polytheists.[15]

After being tortured for and then saved by his faith in Allah, Abraham still had to undergo the hardest test of obedience. A direct order to sacrifice his son Ishmael came from Allah.[16] The order came to Abraham in a dream. Although sadness overwhelmed him, Abraham was a strong believer in Allah, so he did not question the order. Ishmael, too, unquestionably accepted the command of Allah by allowing his father to lead him to a mountaintop to be sacrificed. Ishmael's only request was that his

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[14] See Quran 3:7.

[15] This story is mentioned in the Quran 21:51-68.

[16] A similar story is mentioned in the Old Testament; however, the difference in the Old Testament from Islam's account is that Issac was the son that was to be sacrificed, not Ishmael.

father place him face down in order that his father would not see his facial expression during the sacrifice. Abraham raised his blade, still ready to comply with the command of Allah, when a revelation intercepted and caused the cessation of the sacrifice of his son. Abraham had proven his loyalty to Allah. The incident was a trial to measure Abraham's faith. Abraham was then given a sheep to sacrifice instead. The trial of Abraham is commemorated every year as the *Feast of Sacrifice* (*'eid al-adhaa*). This is a holiday for Muslims in which the meat of animals is distributed to the poor. After passing these tests, Abraham became the leader of humankind, as well as the father of the prophets of the three main monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

WHY DID ALLAH SEND DIFFERENT PROPHETS AND DIFFERENT RELIGIONS?

Although Allah sent prophets to nearly all civilizations, the Quran only mentions twenty-five names. The first of them was Adam, the father of humanity, and the last prophet was Prophet Muhammad, the seal of the prophets.

Throughout history, different messengers with slightly different messages were sent to diverse societies. The reason was that the religious needs of humanity were growing and developing just as the human race was growing and developing. Also, diverse civilizations needed to be approached differently in relation to guidance. Nevertheless, the source and basic message behind the calling was the same: That there was only one Allah.

Allah sent Moses with the Torah as light and guidance for the Children of Israel along with many other prophets such as David and Solomon. Fifteen-hundred years after Moses, Allah sent Jesus,

the son of Mary, confirming the Torah and bringing the Gospel, which is also a book of guidance and light. Finally, six-hundred years after Jesus, Allah sent Prophet Muhammad with the Quran to confirm all the messages sent before him and to complete the revelation of a universal religion to humanity.

Since all the Judeo-Christian-Islamic prophets were sequentially sent, the question arises as to why Judaism, Christianity, and Islam now exist as separate religions. The answer is that the followers of these religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity, interpreted the teachings of their prophets differently. The Quran says:

> **Verily, the religion with Allah is Islam [total submission to Allah's will]; and those whom the Book had been given did not differ but after the knowledge [the truth] had come unto them, out of envy among themselves** (3:19).[17]

Nevertheless, many scholars consider the different religions as a divine test. The Quran says:

> **For each of you, We have made a Law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation but that He may test you in what He has given you. So strive as a race in good deeds. Your return is to Allah; then He will inform you about that which you used to differ** (5:48).

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[17] Also see Quran 10:93.

THE LIFE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

In 6th century C.E. Arabia, the majority of people were pagans. They lived in tribes, each with its own leader. Some were agriculture and cattle farmers, others were merchants and traders, while others raided tribes for booty as a means of survival. It was into this society, in 570CE, that Prophet Muhammad was born within the tribe of Quraysh[18] in the city of Makkah. When his parents died,[19] his grandfather[20] looked after him. When his grandfather died, his uncle, Abu Talib,[21] cared for him. While growing up, Prophet Muhammad became known as "Muhammad the truthful, the trustworthy" (*assadiq, al-amin*). Early into his adulthood, Muhammad worked for a successful widow, Khadija,[22] who was so impressed with his honesty that she asked him to marry her. The Prophet was twenty-five, and they remained in a

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[18] Quraysh, a major tribe in Makkah, of which the clan of Hashim was a part and to which Prophet Muhammad belonged.

[19] Father, Abduallah ibn Abd al-Muttalib. Mother, Amina, daughter of Wahb.

[20] Paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim.

[21] Paternal uncle, father of Imam Ali, one of the chiefs of Makkah and nobleman of Quraysh. He was famous for his generosity, bravery, and dedication in protecting his nephew, Prophet Muhammad. He had accepted Islam and supported the Prophet until the end of his life.

[22] Khadija, the first and most revered wife of the Prophet. She was the first female to embrace Islam. Khadija bore the Prophet six children; two sons, Qasim and Abdullah; four daughters: Ruqawyah, Zaineb, Um-Kalthum, and Fatima. The male children died before the ordination of his prophethood. The daughters survived beyond the advent of their father's prophethood. Khadija was known for her noble traits and sincere dedication to the Prophet. Prophet Muhammad once described Khadija in the following statement: *"I have not acquired a better wife after her, she believed in my prophethood at a time when people rejected it. She placed her wealth at my disposal when people deprived me of attaining it, and Allah gave me, only through her, children, and not from any other woman."*
Jaffar Subhany, *The Message*, p.190.

monogamous marriage until Khadija's death twenty-five years later.

Often, Prophet Muhammad would take a respite from the bustle of Makkah by traveling to a cave for periods of reflection. During one such time, when Muhammad was forty years old, he heard the voice of an angel named Jibril,[23] giving him this command:

> **Recite in the Name of your Lord who creates, creates man from a clot. Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful, who taught the use of the pen, taught humankind that which they knew not** (96: 1-5).

Prophet Muhammad repeated the words until he had memorized them. The Prophet rushed home and told his experience to his wife, Khadija, who comforted and reassured him. Khadija and the Prophet's young cousin, Ali, were the first people to understand and accept that Allah had chosen "the truthful, the trustworthy" to deliver Allah's final guidance. Prophet Muhammad continued to receive revelations for over twenty years.[24]

As time passed, it became clear to the ever-increasing number of people that Prophet Muhammad was indeed the Messenger of Allah. The least receptive people were the powerful Makkans who trafficked in idols and slaves. They benefited mostly from idol worshiping and pilgrim trade. The Makkans treated Prophet

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[23] Angel Jibril is one of the four Archangels and is considered one of the greatest of all angels since he was the channel through which the Divine books and the Scriptures were revealed from Allah to the prophets.
The other three angels: Izrail, the angel of death; Israfil, the angel assigned to sound the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection; Mikail, who watches over places of worship.

[24] See Seeraht ibn Hisham, v.1, p.236.

Muhammad with derision. Despite this, Prophet Muhammad continued to deliver the revelations of Allah's mercy and justice, which were welcomed by the poor and oppressed.

The Makkans were becoming more and more intolerant of Prophet Muhammad and felt threatened by the messages he was advocating, such as the oneness of Allah. With the increasing number of converts to Islam within the region, Prophet Muhammad was becoming a serious threat. In an attempt to dissuade the expansion of Islam, Quraysh exiled the Prophet, his family, and followers from Makkah. Quraysh then sanctioned an economic blockade on trade and association with the Muslims.[25] For three years, the Muslims were sheltered in the valley of Abu Talib, near Makkah. In conditions of hardship and hunger, the Muslims often faced the ration of one date a day; and at times, two shared the date. Yet, because of the Muslim's tenacious faith, the siege ended unsuccessfully.

Shortly after the siege ended, the Prophet was once again faced with tribulation. The two most influential and dearest people to the Prophet died; his uncle, Abu Talib, and his beloved wife, Khadija. Overwhelmed by grief, the Prophet declared that year as "a year of sadness." No longer being protected and supported by his uncle, the Prophet became more vulnerable to the escalating pressure by Quraysh. Leaders from the distant town of Yathrib[26] secretly invited the Prophet and his followers to settle in their hometown

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[25] Seeraht ibn Hisham, v.1, p. 350. An economic treaty was initiated by the grand counsel of Quraysh which entailed an endorsement and a pledge, until their deaths, by the community not to end the economic ban on the Muslims with the following criteria:

1. Every type of trade or business with the supporters of Muhammad shall be banned.
2. Association with Muhammad and his followers is strictly prohibited.
3. Not one person is entitled to establish matrimonial ties with Muslims.
4. Opponents of Muhammad should be supported in all circumstances.

[26] Yathrib was a town approximately 350 miles north of Makkah. Yathrib was later renamed Madina, meaning the city of the Prophet.

and preach the word of Islam. Before migrating to Madina in 622 CE, the Prophet narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in Makkah.[27] The migration from Makkah to Madina became known as the *Hijrah*, which is also the starting point of the Muslim calendar.[28]

Prophet Muhammad was received with excitement and jubilation[29] in Madina, where he became head of what was to become the first Islamic state. Throughout the first ten years in Madina, Muslims witnessed several occasions that were to become milestones in the history of Islam.

The primary task was building the mosque in Madina. The Prophet himself participated in building the mosque of which also housed the Prophet's home. Companions of the Prophet built their homes in close proximately to the mosque to be near the Prophet. It was necessary that the Prophet create a center where its members

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[27] See Quran 8:30.

[28] The Islamic calendar began at the migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madina, and it is based on the lunar cycles. Two important incidents occurred before the migration to Madina: the birth of the Prophet, during the Year of the Elephant 570CE, which symbolizes the year that King Abraha came to destroy the Ka'bah with a herd of elephants (See Quran c.105) and the ordination of Muhammad to prophethood. Islam, in its first thirteen years in Makkah, was constantly suppressed and its followers were tormented. The migration (*hijrah*) marked the turning point in liberating Islam and its followers. In addition, Madina provided a safe haven and an opportunity to establish the birth of the Islamic state. Quranic verses regarding rules of social, economic, political, and formal rituals were mostly introduced in Madina. Muslims consider the migration to Madina as an Islamic victory for freedom of religion.

[29] The Prophet proceeded to Madina. When his camel descended at Thaniyatul Al-Wida and set its foot on the land of Yathrib, the people warmly welcomed and greeted the Prophet with jubilation. The mood surrounding this event is marked by a well-known lyric:

> *The moon rose from "Thaniyatul Al-Wida." It is our duty to be thankful for this blessing, till the day when even one person on the face of the earth prays to Allah and worships Him.*

could assemble. The mosque was not only a place of worship, but also a center of social, political, and educational services.

The unity of brotherhood was introduced. There were two major tribes in Madina: Muhajreen and Ansar.[30] The Ansar were divided into two groups: Aws and Khazraj;[31] they fought for 120 years. Under a common purpose—Islam, the Prophet appeased the animosity that existed among the tribes by forming them as brethrens of one another. ***"Now you should become brothers in faith, by pairs,"*** the Prophet said to his followers.[32] By this method, the Prophet insured the political and spiritual nature of his nation. Today, the unity of brotherhood continues to remain a tremendous act of equality among Muslims. Islam is the foundation on which all races, nationalities, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and genders can be united by religious kinship.

The Prophet made the institution of matrimony easier. The gift in marriage (dower) was made moderate, and inter-marriages with other tribes became more accessible. Socioeconomic or ancestral descent was no longer a major factor in marriage. The establishment of marriage became a form of uniting, securing, and promoting Islam within various tribes and nations. Marriage not only symbolized the religious union of a man and a woman, but also, indirectly influenced and affected social and political ties. The Prophet said, *"He who wishes to appear before Allah with a pure soul, should marry."* [33]

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[30] Muhajreen (Muslim immigrants from Makkah) and Ansar (the Helpers who received the Prophet in Madina) were the two major groups of Muslims in Madina.

[31] Aws and Khazraj were major tribes within Ansar that lived and supported the Prophet in Madina.

[32] Seeraht ibn Hisham, v. 1 p. 123.

[33] Jaffar Subhani, *The Message*, p. 358.

The Prophet set the example of marriage with his own daughter, Fatima. Although many companions had proposed marriage to Fatima, they were aware that the marriage of Fatima was not going to be based on affluence, rank, or descent. The men knew that the person that resembled the Prophet in matters of truthfulness, spiritual merit, and moral excellence would be none other than Ali. However, the Prophet (by direction of Allah) told the suitors that the marriage of Fatima would only occur by divine order. When Ali approached the Prophet to seek his blessings to marry his daughter, he was overcome with shyness. The Prophet encouraged him to speak. Ali proposed, but the Prophet did not answer him immediately. The Prophet then consulted Fatima, and she accepted. The marriage of Ali and Fatima was then solemnized with a symbolic marriage dower.

From the migration to Madina, the Prophet faced continual threats from Quraysh, the polytheists of Makkah, and the non-Muslims in Madina. Peace and security were paramount, yet attempts to keep peace within the region by the Prophet were futile. The opposition in Makkah mobilized its troops to demolish the newly established state in Madina. Standing firm in the face of military aggression, the Prophet was compelled to defend Islam in what was called "The Battle of Badr." The battle erupted only two years into the *hijrah* (migration), and although the Prophet's army was far outnumbered, they triumphed. A story about the battle in the Quran reveals that Allah had sent an army of angels to assist the Muslims against the Makkans.[34] The Muslims' success in the battle gave immense prestige to the infant Islamic community in Madina and dealt a major blow to the pride of the Makkans.

The following year, the Makkans wanted to avenge their defeat. On a hill called Uhud, west of Madina, the second major battle was fought in what has become known as "The Battle of Uhud." In the beginning of the battle, the Muslims showed signs of victory;

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[34] See Quran 3: 124-126.

however, the insubordination[35] of some Muslim men caused the final setback in the battle in which many Muslims were injured and lost their lives. The Prophet himself was injured, and he lost his uncle, Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib. Although the battle of Uhud was a set back for the Muslim community, they were able to remain in Madina. Yet, many other victorious battles of defense consolidated the Muslims;[36] hence, Islam became an ever-increasing spiritual and political force in Arabia which also paved the way to the conquest of Makkah.

In the ninth year of *Hijrah* (630CE), Prophet Muhammad and his followers entered Makkah after a peaceful surrender by the Makkans. The Prophet went directly to the *Ka'bah.*[37] The Prophet began to perform the circumambulation (*tawaf*) around the Ka'bah and turned toward the three main idols that had been stationed above the entrance of the Ka'bah. With his spear, Prophet Muhammad destroyed them while reciting, *"And say, truth has arrived and falsehood has perished, for falsehood is bound to perish."*[38] Subsequentially, hundreds of idols were destroyed inside and around the Ka'bah. The destruction of the idols symbolized the arrival and the proclamation of truth and the end to falsehood. Islam was now home. The Prophet then granted general amnesty to all the Makkans who had fought against him for twenty-two years. The Prophet addressed them with these words:

> *You have been my very and reasonable countrymen.*
> *You refuted my prophethood and turned me out of*

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[35] See Quran 3: 152.
Seerat ibn Hisham, v.2 p.400.
[36] Battles such as: Ahzab 5AH, Khaybar 7AH, Mutah 8 AH, and Thatusalasil 8 AH.
[37] Ka'bah is a cube made of stone. It was first built by Prophet Adam. Later, Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt the Ka'ba's foundation. The Ka'bah is the center and direction of Muslim prayers.
[38] Quran 17:31.

> *my home, and when I took refuge in a far-off place, you rose to fit against me. You killed my uncle and my best companions. However, in spite of all these crimes of yours, I forgive all of you and make you free, and declare that you may go after the pursuits of your life.*[39]

During the tenth year of *hijrah,* the Prophet performed the farewell *Hajj.*[40] On the day of Arafat, over 100,000 pilgrims were present when the Prophet commenced his sermon by saying:

> *O People! Hear my words, for it is possible that I may not meet you at this place in the future. O People! Your blood and property (honor and reputation) are forbidden toward one another till the day you meet Allah. O People! Your women have rights upon you and you also have rights upon them. You should treat them with kindness and love, and you should provide them with a comfortable means in life...*[41]

Less than three months after the farewell pilgrimage, and days before the Prophet's death, the final verse of the Quran was revealed, **"Today I [Allah] have perfected for you your religion, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion"** (5:3). On the 28th of Safar, 11 AH, at the age of sixty-three, the Prophet died. At the time of his death, the majority of people in Arabia had accepted Islam as their religion and way of life.

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[39] Sirat ibn Hisham, v.4 p.55.
[40] See chapter on *Hajj.*
[41] Sirat ibn Hisham v.2 p. 605.



IV
SUCCESSION TO PROPHET MUHAMMAD (*IMAMA*)

The universal messengers of Allah had successors. Allah appointed His messengers for the guidance of humankind. Yet, Allah also appointed successors to the prophets and messengers as a matter of necessity. Abraham was succeeded by two of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Moses, during his lifetime, was succeeded by his brother, Aaron. Similarly, Prophet Muhammad was succeeded by twelve distinguished successors, one after another. These successors were called *imams* and were appointed by Allah, not by humankind. The right to ordain *imams* belongs to Allah, and the Quran makes this point in many verses, **"And remember when your Lord said to the angels, 'Verily I am going to place a successor [*khalifa*]"** (2:30). In another verse the Quran states, **"And remember when the Lord of Abraham tried him with certain commands which he fulfilled; Allah said to him, 'Verily I am going to make you a leader [*imam*] of mankind'"** (2:124). Allah addressed Prophet David as such, **"O David! Verily We have placed you as a successor on earth"** (38:26). Allah also attributes the right of appointing leaders to Himself; **"We made from among them leaders, giving guidance under Our command"** (32:24). During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, he mentioned specifically the names of the leaders [*imams*] that

would come after him. The Prophet said that there would be twelve leaders, and that all of them would be descendents of Quraysh.[42]

The *imams* were the authorities of Allah among humankind. The *imams* all had special personalities in matters of knowledge, forbearance, morality, and justice.

The twelve successors to Prophet Muhammad are as follows:

1. ***Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib.***

   Father's name: Abu Talib ibn[43] Abd al-Muttalib.
   Mother's name: Fatima bint[44] Asad.
   Birth: Makkah, on the 13th of Rajab, 23BH[45] (600CE).
   Death: Murdered at the age of sixty-three. While he prayed, he was mortally wounded by a poisoned sword of an assassin on the 21st Ramadan 40AH[46](661CE), in Kufa. Buried in an-Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

   Known as the "Commander of Faithfuls" (*amir al-muminin).* Imam Ali was the Prophet's first cousin and son-in-law (married to Fatima); he was the first male to embrace Islam. The Prophet ascribed Imam Ali with historical sayings such as, *"I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate,"* and *"Whoever considers me his leader, Ali is also his leader."*[47] Imam Ali was recognized for his knowledge, wisdom,

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[42] Bukhari, *The Book of* Ahkam (*Laws*), vol. 1 p. 101; Muslim, *Kitab al-Imaara* (The Book of Leadership), vol. 1 narrations 4-6, *et al.*
[43] Ibn means "son of."
[44] Bint means "daughter of."
[45] BH stands for "before Hijrah."
[46] AH stands for "after Hijrah."
[47] Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 4: 281.
Al-Tabari, 2:169.

bravery, and justice. Many of Imam Ali's traditions and speeches have been preserved in a book called *The Peak of Eloquence* (Nahj al-Balagha).

2. ***Imam Hasan ibn Ali.***

Father's name: Ali ibn Abi Talib.
Mother's name: Fatima bint Prophet Muhammad.
Birth: Madina, on the 15th Ramadan, 2AH (625CE).
Death: Died at the age of forty-six. Poisoned under the direction of Mu'awiah, governor of Syria on the 27th Safar 49AH (670CE) Buried in Al- Baqi cemetery, Madina.

Imam Hasan was the eldest son of Imam Ali and Fatima. He devoted himself to the sacred mission of peacefully propagating Islam. He excelled all others in knowledge and spiritual perfection. He resembled the Prophet in forbearance and generosity. For example, the Imam shared beneficence towards a man who was verbally abusing him. The Imam approached the man with a smile and remarked, *"May peace be with you. I think you have just arrived in this town, if you need food, I can provide food for you. If you need clothing, I can provide you with clothing. If you need shelter, I can provide you a place to stay. If you need transportation, I can provide you with a ride, and if you need protection, I can protect you."* After hearing this, the man replied, *"I testify that you are the vicegerent of Allah on earth, and Allah knows better of whom to entrust with the divine message."*

3. ***Imam Husain ibn Ali.***

Father's name: Ali ibn Abi Talib.
Mother's name: Fatima bint Prophet Muhammad.
Birth: Madina, on the 3rd of Shaban 3AH (626CE).

Death: Martyred at the age of fifty-eight in Karbala (Iraq), by the ruling army of Yazid ibn Muawiyah, on the 10th of Muharram, 61AH (680CE) and buried there.

Imam Husain devoted most of his life to following the footsteps of his father and grandfather. During the time of the Ummayad Dynasty, corruption and mischief prevailed. Imam Husain took it upon himself to oppose the authoritative regime of Yazid. By the invitation of the people of Iraq, Imam Husain left his home in Madina and journeyed to Kufa with his family and companions. Before reaching Kufa, about sixty miles south of Baghdad, on the plains of Karbala, Imam Husain was unfairly surrounded by Yazid's army and ultimately, on the 10th of Muharram, Imam Husain, his family, and companions were massacred in an unequal battle. This day is known in Islamic history as "The Day of Asurha." The battle of Karbala represents the battle between truth and falsehood, good and evil, and justice and injustice, oppression and freedom. Consequentially, the Imam became the beacon of light for the freedom of all Muslims. His martyrdom shook the foundations of the Muslim nation and stirred the consciousness of the people. Numerous revolutions and revolts followed Imam Husain's martyrdom until the empire of Bani Umayyad collapsed. Asurha still plays a very significant role in the life of Muslims today, in that the sacrifices of the martyrs symbolize the endeavor to fight injustice and deviation for all times and societies.

4. *Imam Ali ibn al-Husain.*

Father's name: Husain ibn Ali.
Mother's name: Shah-Zanan, daughter of Yazdeger III, King of Persia.

Birth: Madina, on the 15th of Jamada al-Awal, 36AH (659CE).
Death: Died at the age of fifty-eight. Poisoned by Walid ibn Abdil Malik ibn Marwan on the 25th of Muharram, 95AH (713CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

He was known for his consistent worshipping and spiritual perfection in helping the needy. He used to carry bags of flour and bread on his back for the poor and needy families in Madina. He left behind many legacies of spiritual guidance, prayers, and supplications. Collections of his edited prayers are known as *az-Zabur, The Psalm of Al Muhammad.* Whenever a needy person approached him for help the Imam would say, *"Welcome to those who carry for my supplies to the next life."*

5. *Imam Muhammad al-Baqir.*

Father's name: Ali Zaynul Abidin.
Mother's name: Fatima bint Hasan.
Birth: Madina, on the 3rd Safar 57AH (676CE).
Death: Died at the age of fifty-seven. Poisoned by the ruler Hisham ibn Abdel Malik ibn Marwan, on the 7th of Thi, Al-Hijah, 124AH (733CE). Buried in Al-Baqi cemetery, Madina.

A man of great virtue and extensive knowledge, Imam al-Baqir established the foundation of a grand university in Islamic studies in Madina. His pupils compiled books on different branches of science, jurisprudence, and arts under his instruction and guidance. A distinguished scholar from Makkah, ibn Ata, once described him; he states, *"I never saw other scholars look as small as they did in the presence of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir."* One of his students, Muhammad ibn Muslim, said, *"I asked al-Baqir all the*

questions that came to my mind (30,000 questions over a period of time), and he competently answered them all."

6. ***Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq.***

Father's name: Muhammad al-Baqir.
Mother's name: Fatima bint Al-Qasim.
Birth: Madina, on the 17th Rabi al-Awwal, 83AH (702 CE).
Death: Died at the age of sixty-five. Poisoned by Abu Jaffar al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph on the 25th Shawwal 148AH (765CE). Buried in Al- Baqi cemetery, Madina.

Imam as-Sadiq's father taught him the science of religion and the teachings of Islam. He became an authority for scholars and preachers and an expert in jurisprudence. After the martyrdom of his father, Imam as-Sadiq transformed the Prophetic mosque in Madina into a university from which to teach and expand Islamic theology. Imam Ja'far graduated hundreds of scholars who were versed in Islamic science and prophetic traditions. He also taught some of the founders of the Islamic schools of jurisprudence. Scholars and preachers gave testimony, acknowledging Imam as-Sadiq's great knowledge of Islam. One scholar, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi said, *"Never have I seen scholars less knowledgeable in the presence of a man like Ja'far al-Sadiq."* Men of knowledge and piety recognized the characteristics of Imam as-Sadiq in leadership, scholarship, and as an unprecedented educator. The Imam was also a great social personality and an effective political force.

Imam as-Sadiq narrated thousands of traditions (*hadith*), regarding every facet of life. He extensively discussed Islamic ethics, mannerisms, integrity, goodness of character, and acts of worship. Additionally, he discussed jurisprudence

and debated with leaders from various Islamic schools of thought.

7. *Imam Musa al-Kathim.*

Father's name: Imam Jaffar al-Sadiq.
Mother's name: Um-Hamida.
Birth: Abwa (an area between Makkah and Madina) on the 7th of Safar 128 AH (746CE).
Death: Poisoned on the 25th of Rajab, 183AH (799CE), Baghdad.

Imam al-Kathim was the most knowledgeable person of Islam during his time, and he was mostly known for his long prostrations to Allah. He was known as "al-Kathim" for showing his extreme patience and forbearance, due to his resistance against the tyranny of the Abbasid Caliph, Haroon. He was imprisoned for fourteen years in a hostile environment in Basra and Baghdad, where he was eventually murdered.

8. *Imam Ali ar-Rida.*

Father's name: Imam Musa al'Kathim.
Mother's name: Sayidda Najma.
Birth: Madina on 11th of Thi Al-Qudah, 148AH (765CE).
Death: Poisoned by the Abbassid Caliph on the last day of Safar, 203AH (818 CE). Buried in Mashad.

Imam ar-Rida was summoned by the Abbassid Caliph, Mamoon, to the province of Khorasan to be crowned a prince as an attempt to quell the resistance of the caliph's dynasty. The Imam initially refused; yet, he was then threatened with

death. The Imam accepted conditionally, but he was eventually murdered.

9. *Imam Muhammad al-Jawad.*

Father's name: Imam Ali ar-Rida.
Mother's name: Sayyidda Subaika.
Birth: Madina, on the 10th of Rajab 195AH (811CE).
Death: Poisoned by the Caliph, Al-Mutasim, in the city of Baghdad on the last day of Thi Al-Qudah 220AH (835CE).

At a very young age Imam al-Jawad was engaged in interfaith dialogue with the scholars of his time. Consequently, he became known among the people for his vast knowledge of Islam.

10. *Imam Ali al-Hadi.*

Father's name: Muhammad al-Jawad.
Mother's name: Sayyida Samanah.
Borth: Madina on the 15th of Thi Al-Hijah, 202 AH (827CE).
Death: Poisoned on the 3rd of Rajab, 254 AH (868CE). Buried in Samarah.

During his time, Imam Ali al-Hadi remarkably surpassed others in human perfection, moral qualities, and generosity. He was summoned by the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mutawakil, to the city of Samarah, which housed the military barricade of the Abbasid Dynasty. There, Imam al-Hadi was placed under house arrest. He was subsequentially murdered.

11. *Imam Hasan al-Askari.*

Father's name: Ali al-Hadi.
Mother's name: Sayyida Jiddh.
Birth: The 10th of al-Rabi al-Thani, 232AH (846CE).
Death: Poisoned by the Caliph of his time on the 8th of Rabi al-Awal 260AH(874CE) in the city of Samarah.

Imam al-Askari physically and spiritually resembled his great grandfather the Prophet. The Christians of the time looked upon him as sharing the same qualities as Jesus.

12. *Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi.*

Father: Imam Hasan al-Askari.
Mother: Sayyida Nurgis.
Birth: Samarah on 15th of Shaban 255AH (869CE) to the present day.

Imam al-Mahdi is the last of the *imams*, and it is with him that the line of succession to Prophet Muhammad ends. Islamic schools of thought agree that at the end of time Imam al-Mahdi will reappear to make justice prevail on earth after it being overwhelmed with injustice and tyranny. The idea that humanity will be saved is not peculiar to the Islamic faith. It is also shared by other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Although the concept of Imam al-Mahdi still alive after nearly thirteen centuries seems unconceivable by some, the Quran sets several examples of prophets who are still currently living, such as Jesus and Elijah[48]. The Quran also gives two other examples in the story of the "companions of the cave"[49] and

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[48] See Quran 18: 60-82.
[49] See Quran 18: 25.

Uzayr.[50] The continuous existence of Imam al-Mahdi is considered one of the miracles of Allah, and Muslims believe in it as part of the unseen world.[51] Imam Mahdi, still lives in this world by the will of Allah, but he does not live in public view. However, toward the end of human civilization, when the world is filled with evil and injustice, Imam al-Mahdi will appear to restore order and allow justice to prevail.

- ***Fatima al-Zahra.***

Father's name: Prophet Muhammad.
Mother's name: Khadija bint Kowailed.
Birth: Makkah on the 20th day of *Jumaada al-Thaani,* [52] (614CE) forty-five years after the birth of the Prophet.
Death: On the 3rd of *Jumaada al-Thaani* 11AH (632CE). Buried in Medina.

Although Fatima al-Zahra is not considered as an *imam,* she is, however, included in this list because of her high status and importance. Fatima was five years old during the advent of Islam. Although the Prophet had several children, Fatima was his favorite. Fatima and her father, Prophet Muhammad, had a unique bond. Aisha,[53] one of the wives of the Prophet, said, *"I never saw a person who so resembled her father in speech, movements, and gestures more than Fatima, and when she goes to visit her father, he stands, takes her hand, kisses it, and places her in his own seat."*[54] Fatima was loving and spiritually close to her father. The Prophet once said this about his daughter, *"Fatima is part of me. Whoever*

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[50] See Quran 2:259.
[51] See Quran 2:3.
[52] Jumaada al-Thaani is the sixth month of the Islamic calendar.
[53] Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr (the first Caliph), and one of the wives of the Prophet.
[54] Feiruz Abadi, *Fadhaail al-Khamsa*, vol.3 p. 127.

angers her angers me, and she is the mother of her father."[55] Fatima carried the light of the message of the Prophet to the generations that were to come through her offspring. A chapter in the Quran[56] was revealed about her:

> **Verily, We have granted you [Prophet Muhammad] *al-Kawthar*.[57] Therefore, turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice for Him. And he who makes you angry—he will be cut off from offspring.**

Fatima was married to Imam Ali and had four children: Hasan, Husain, Zaynab, and Um Kalthoum. Fatima was the perfect example of virtue and righteousness; an exemplary woman in Islam. Fatima set many examples in her social and political life. A few days after the demise of the Prophet, Fatima died at the young age of eighteen.

THE FAMILY OF THE PROPHET (*AHL AL-BAYT*)

Ahl al-Bayt refers to the immediate family members of Prophet Muhammad—daughter Fatima, cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and grandchildren, Hasan and Husain. The purity of *Ahl al-Bayt* is

[55] Bukhari, vol. 2 p. 185; *Usud al-Ghaaba*, vol. 5 p. 520.
[56] Quran chapter 108, "*Al-Kawthar*."
[57] *Kawthar* is one of the names of Fatima, as well as the name of a river in Paradise.

spoken of in the Quran, **"Allah only wishes to remove all uncleanliness from you, O People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*), and to make you as pure as possible"** (33:33). Like the prophets, these five members and the nine descendant *imams* from Husain are referred to as *Ahl al-Bayt.* They are all considered infallible. Near the end of Prophet Muhammad's life he said:

> *It is probable that I will be called soon, and I will respond. So I leave behind me, among you, two weighty things: the Book of Allah [the Quran], and my Ahl al-Bayt. Verily, Allah, the Merciful, the Aware, has informed me that these two will never be separated from each other until they meet me at the fountain in Heaven called Kawthar.*[58]

The Prophet also said:

> *The parable of my Ahl al-Bayt is similar to that of Noah's ark. Whoever embarks on it will certainly be rescued, but whoever opposes the boarding of it will surely be drowned.*[59]

As a rule, the prophets of Allah did not ask any reward for the pain and suffering they endured while attempting to guide humankind. In fact, this refusal to accept compensation can be seen as the mark of a prophet. The Quran states, **"Obey those who ask no reward from you and who have themselves received guidance"** (36:21). However, by the command of Allah, Prophet Muhammad made one slight exception; although the Prophet

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[58] Sahih Muslim, vol. 2 p. 238 and Sahih Tirmithi, vol. II p. 220, *et. al.*

[59] *Mishkaat al-masaabih*, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, p. 523 and *Faraa'id al-Simtayn*, vol. 2 p. 242, *et. al.*

refused to accept anything for himself, he was commanded to say, **"I do not ask you for any reward except love for my relatives [the *Ahl al-Bayt*]"** (42:23).

Imam Ali spoke about *Ahl al-Bayt*:

> *We, the Ahl al-Bayt, possess the doors of wisdom and light of governance. Beware that the paths of religion are one and its highways are straight. He who follows them achieves and secures the aim and objective. And he who stands away from them goes astray and incurs repentance.*[60]

The example of the descendants of Prophet Muhammad is like that of stars in the sky; "*When one star sets another one rises.*"[61]

> *We are lights of the heavens and the earth and the ships of salvation. We are the repositories of knowledge, and toward us is the homecoming of all matters. Through our Mahdi (the final successor to the Prophet) all arguments shall be refuted, and he is the seal of the imams, the deliverer of the Muslim nation (ummah), and the extremity of the light. Happy are those who hold onto our handle and are brought together upon our love.*[62]

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[60] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon 120.
[61] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon 100.
[62] Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, *Tadhkirat al*-Khawass, p. 138.



V
THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE RESURRECTION (*QIYAMA*)

The day of resurrection will be the time when all of humankind will be brought back to their original physical form. There will be a time on earth when everything that Allah created will cease. Every human being, from the past to the present, will be resurrected and examined by their deeds. This day is called the "Day of Judgment." The Quran states:

> **O mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the resurrection, then, verily, We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh [both] shaped and shapeless, that We make it clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterwards We bring you forth as infants: then you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies [young] and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life so that, after knowledge, he knows nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send**

> **down water on it, it thrills and swells and puts forth every lovely kind [of growth]. That is because Allah is Reality, and it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things, and because the Hour [of Judgment] will come concerning which there is no doubt, and because Allah will raise those who are in the graves (22:5-7).**

Regarding The Day of Judgment Allah states:

> **Verily We shall give life to the dead, and We record all that they send before and that they leave behind, and We have taken account of all things in a clear Book [of evidence]" (36:12).**
>
> **And to every soul will be paid in full of its deeds, and He knows best all that they do (39:70).**

The number of verses in the Quran that deal with life after death and the Day of Resurrection is close to 1,200. This is in addition to a vast number of traditions related from Prophet Muhammad and the *imams*. This number reveals the importance and significance of life after death and emphasizes that the life of a human being does not end at death, but, in fact, continues afterward towards a new life. The Quran calls this life the "true life."[63]

Many people wonder if eventually humankind is going to die. Why then were people created in the first place? Humankind was created to be the caretaker of earth; thus, life on earth becomes a

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[63] See Quran 29:64.

test, to maintain and preserve nature. More importantly, to maintain and preserve our moral natures.

According to Islam, a person will be judged according to his or her life's actions. People whose deeds and actions in life are mainly good will enter Heaven (also called the Garden or Paradise). However, if one's deeds or actions are mainly evil, he or she will enter Hell (also referred to as the Fire). On the Day of Judgment, everyone will know the fate of everyone else.

Both Heaven and Hell have different levels. The worst of people will be in the lowest depths of Hell, while the best of people will be in the highest parts of Heaven.

DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

Through religious doctrine, humanity has been shown a glimpse of what life is like after death. The Quran reveals some of the secrets surrounding the soul:

> **It is Allah who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those souls for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for people who think deeply** (39:42).

> **And they ask you concerning the spirit. Say: "The spirit, it is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord, and of**

> **knowledge, you mankind have been given only a little"** (17:85).

For the believers, the departure of the soul will be peaceful:

> **It will be said to the pious: "O you in complete rest and satisfaction, come back to your Lord well-please yourself and well-pleasing unto Him. Enter then among my honored servants, and enter my Paradise"** (89:27-30).

The Quran reveals that a person who is near death will become aware that he or she is going to die. For those people who are destined for Hell, the parting of the soul will be accompanied by severe pain. The moment of death has been described in the Quran:

> **Nay! When the soul reaches the collarbone, and it will be said, "Who can cure him and save him from death?" And he, the dying person, will conclude that it is the time of departing, and he is shrouded; the drive on that day will be to your Lord** (75:26-30).

> **Remember that the two recording angels receive each human being after attaining the age of puberty, one sitting on the right and one on the left, to note his actions. Not a word does he utter but there is a watcher sitting by him to record it. And the stupor of death will come in truth; this is what you have been avoiding. And the trumpet will be blown; that will be the day whereof**

> **warning had been given, and every person will come forth with an angel to drive him and an angel to bear witness. It will be said to the sinners: "Indeed, you were heedless of this. Now We have removed your covering, and sharp is your sight this day"** (50:17-22).

When the deceased are buried, their souls will accompany their physical bodies to the grave. The soul will then be questioned therein by two angels concerning their lifetime actions, deeds, and faith. The soul will then remain buried alongside the body. Although the body will perish, the soul will remain living until the time of one's resurrection on the Day of Judgment.[64]

Islam believes that before the time of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment the souls of people, in their graves, will either live in comfort or distress before ultimately entering Heaven or Hell. This abode is called *Barzakh.* The life of *barzakh* can be described as a small form of paradise or hell. A person's faith, whether good or bad, will determine the atmosphere of *barzakh,* namely, pleasant or an unpleasant.[65]

Once Prophet Jesus sent two messengers to the city of Antioch to call for monotheism and the worshipping of Allah. One of the men of that town embraced the faith and followed the messengers. The king of the land ordered him to be killed. As the righteous man was dying, he said, **"Verily I have believed in your Lord. So listen to me." It was said to him when the disbelievers killed him, 'Enter paradise.' He said, "Would that my people knew what my Lord Allah has forgiven me for and made me one of the honored ones"** (36:25-27). The Paradise that the man had entered was the small form of Paradise called *barzakh.*

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[64] See Quran 56:1-56.
[65] Quran 36:26-27.

The descriptions of the small hell and the ultimate hell are very vivid and painful in the Quran which states, **"Evil torment encompassed the Pharaoh [and his people]—the fire: they are exposed to it morning and afternoon [*barzakh*], and on the day when the Hour will be established [Hell]"** (40:46).

REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Repentance is the giving up of sin, and it is the best way of expressing regret for having committed one. It involves sincerely regretting the particular sin, and then resolving never to do it again. Repentance is the source of and way to success. The Quran says, **"Turn to Allah, O Believers, that you may be successful"** (24:31). No matter how grievous a person's sin may be, Allah's forgiveness is much greater. No one should be ashamed to turn toward Allah in repentance. Allah can erase the sins of whomever He pleases. The Quran states:

> **Say, O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, despair not of the mercy of Allah; verily, Allah forgives all sins. Verily, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful** (39:53).
>
> **Tell My servants that I am the Forgiving, the Merciful** (15:49).
>
> **Will they not turn to Allah and ask His forgiveness? Allah is the Forgiving, the Merciful** (5:74).

Your Lord is full of forgiveness for mankind in spite of their wrongdoing (13:6).

Despite Allah's ability to destroy mankind (if He so willed), Allah possesses the main characteristics of forgiveness and mercy. For this reason, Muslims begin nearly every action, speech, or endeavor with the words, *"In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate."*[66]

Repentance is of benefit both now and during the Hereafter. Prophet Muhammad narrated that the act of repenting brings an increase of wealth, protection from danger, and an easing of hardships and difficulties. Furthermore, it has been said that the fastest way to attain closeness to Allah is to humble oneself before Allah, and admitting the wrongdoing. The benefits of repentance for the next life are obvious—entrance into Paradise and safety from the Hellfire.

Repentance will be accepted up until the moment of death. Prophet Muhammad once said that if a person seeks repentance one year before dying Allah will accept the repentance. Even if a person seeks repentance one day before dying, Allah will accept it. Then, the Prophet pointed to his throat and said that even if someone seeks repentance before his soul reaches here (pointing to his throat), Allah will accept it.

Nonetheless, repentance should be done as soon as possible and should not be delayed; this point has been emphasized again and again in the Islamic tradition. Imam Ali said, *"How numerous are the procrastinators who postpone [repenting and doing good deeds] until death overtakes them!"*[67]

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[66] *Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim.*
[67] *Ghurar al-Hikm*, p. 240.

Repentance should be done privately and secretly. People can establish a direct link to Allah while seeking repentance without the necessity of a third person interfering. If a person commits a sin, he or she should not let others know about the sin. Prophet Muhammad once said to Imam Ali, *"O Ali, blessed is he whom Allah looks upon while he is weeping for the sin that none is aware of except Allah."*[68]

In addition to not revealing his or her own sins, every person must conceal the faults of his brother or sister to preserve that person's honor and the honor of society. That person's faults may be dealt with personally and privately, but they should not be spread among society.

Allah loves a person who sincerely repents his or her sin; hence, the repented sin will be considered as if he or she had never committed that sin. Imam al-Baqir said, *"He who repents of his sins is as one who has not any burden of sin."*[69] However, repentance must be sincere. Allah knows who sincerely regrets misdeeds and who is just speaking empty words. A person came to Imam Ali and said, *"Astaghfirullah. I seek Allah's forgiveness."* The Imam replied:

> *Do you know what asking Allah's forgiveness is? Forgiveness is a word that stands on six supports. The first is to repent over the past. The second is to make a firm determination never to revert to it. The third is to discharge all the rights of people so that you may meet Allah quite clean with nothing which to account for. The fourth is to fulfill every obligation which you ignored in the past so that you may now be just with it. The fifth is to aim at the*

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[68] *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 77 p. 63.
[69] *Wasaa'il ash-Shi'a*, vol. 16 p. 74.

flesh grown as a result of unlawful earning so that you may melt it by grief of repentance till the skin touches the bone and a new flesh grows between them. And the sixth is to make the body taste the pain of obedience as you previously made it taste the sweetness of disobedience. On such an occasion, you may say, "I seek Allah's forgiveness."[70]

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[70] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), saying #426.



~ ISLAMIC PRACTICES ~

Islam is like a tree whose roots are its beliefs and whose branches are its practices. If the roots are not firm and healthy, the tree will not survive; the roots only form the foundation of the tree. The Islamic practices are referred to as such because they are the ways in which the theories of Islam (the beliefs) are transformed into reality. The different forms of outward worship translate a person's inner love and connection with Allah into a physical form.

Islam has ten fundamental practices: prayers, fasting, two forms of almsgiving, pilgrimage to the city of Makkah, *jihad*, enjoining good, forbidding evil, supporting those who walk in the path of Allah, and turning away from the enemies of Allah.

I
PRAYERS (*SALAAT*)

Prayers are the pillars of religion. Through prayer people establish communication and dialogue with Allah. It makes one become aware and realize that he or she is not alone in this universe; each person has been created for a legitimate purpose. Allah created human beings to recognize and appreciate His grace and blessings.

Just as the body needs food to survive and grow, so does the soul. The food of the soul is prayer. In order for people to receive their necessary spiritual nourishment, and to maintain a strong connection with Allah, Islam instructs Muslims to pray at five particular times during the day. For example, the Quran states:

> **Establish regular prayers from mid-day till the darkness of the night, and recite the Quran in the early dawn; verily, the recitation of the Quran in the early dawn is an act witnessed** (17:78-79).

THE NECESSITY OF CONNECTION WITH THE ABSOLUTE

The instinct to worship is an innate aspect of human beings; it is part of their natural disposition (*fitra*). Since the dawn of humanity, civilizations have worshipped the Creator in many different ways.

The need for prayer is great, and a deep, strong, innate feeling within people drives them toward the Absolute Power to seek His help and assistance. Islam has set five prescribed forms prayers that must be completed everyday at specific times. All the daily prayers consist of recitations from the Quran and various bodily movements (prostrations).

People offer their prayers to Allah for many reasons; the first being the grandeur of the Creator. When one ponders and reflects upon the nature of the universe, and all the diverse and intricate matters that keep life in harmony, one would automatically conclude the existence of a mightier power—Allah. The Quran states:

> **Truly, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the succession of night and day, there are signs for all who are endowed with insight, and who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and contemplate creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying]: "Our Lord, You have not created this without meaning and purpose, limitless are You in Your subtle Glory!"** (3:191).

When a Muslim prays, he or she is acknowledging the grandeur of Allah. Prayer is a serene and uninterrupted time of communicating, building a relationship with one's Creator. The recitation of Islamic prayers encompasses a complete mental and spiritual concentration. It is a commitment not to leave the prayers aside. Those believers who establish prayers and show their devotion through them have mastered one of the foremost qualities of reverence toward Allah:

> **Successful are the believers—those who offer their prayers with humility and submissiveness...and those who guard their five compulsory prayers. These are indeed the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise and abide forever therein** (23:1; 23:9-11).

Prayers render moments of reflection and are a reminder of one's actions throughout the day. Prayers have significant benefits upon an individual such as discouraging bad actions or asking of forgiveness. The Quran states, **"Truly, prayer restrains from evil and shameful deeds"** (29:45). Prayers keep one's perspective of life's ultimate meaning and goal. Imam Ali said, *"If a prayerful person knew to what extent he was surrounded by Allah's mercy, he would never raise his head from prostration."*[71]

The need to worship is as strong as the need to eat, and just as the person who lacks proper food will eat anything to put an end to his or her hunger, the person who does not find proper spiritual nutrition will be led to unlawful worshipping such as the worship of animals, fire, stars, art, materialism, or anything else that has no power to aid nor harm anyone. Whether people have a structured religion or not, everyone worships something.

In society, whenever people meet others who they perceive to be of a high rank such as celebrities, politicians, doctors, scholars, and so on; they show considerable respect for them—sometimes, at the expense of their own dignity. If people show this much respect for other human beings, who were also created like them from dust then how much respect should they show before the Creator whose knowledge, superiority, and grandeur is limitless and eternal? Should they not, at least, stand before Him many times a day and bow in respect and gratitude?

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[71] *Gharar al-Hikm*, p. 175.

Human beings feel frail in front of Allah. If they try to act on their own, without the help of their Lord, they will be prone to failure because the source of all power and might is Allah. Those who accomplished great feats for humanity—scientists in the laboratory, soldiers in the battlefield, astronauts in space, doctors in the hospital—all sought assistance from their Lord before embarking on their adventures. Alone, human beings are inferior and in need of Allah. The Quran states:

> **O mankind! You are the ones who are in need of Allah, but Allah is free from all needs, worthy of praise. If He wanted, He could destroy you and bring about a new creation, and that is not hard for Allah** (35:15-17).

WHEN A SOCIETY CEASES TO PRAY

Forsaking prayer is perilous. The Quran states:

> **There has succeeded them a posterity who have given up the prayers and followed their lusts, so they will be living lost, in confusion and disarray...** (19:59).

DETAILS OF THE FIVE PRESCRIBED PRAYERS

Preconditions

Times:

1. *The dawn prayer (Fajr)*: This prayer should be done between the time the first ray of light appears in the sky and the time of sunrise.

2. *The noon prayer (Duhr)*: The specific time for this prayer is right after the sun passes over its noon position. However, it can be done up until sunset.

3. *The afternoon prayer (Asr)*: This prayer can be done any time after the noon prayer and before sunset.

4. *The sunset prayer (Maghrib)*: This prayer should be done after the sun sets at the time when the red sky on the eastern horizon disappears. Yet, it can be done up until midnight.

5. *The night prayer (Ishaa)*: This prayer can be done any time after the sunset prayer and before midnight.

Direction (*al-qiblah*):

During prayer, all Muslims must face the *Ka'bah*, the House of Allah, built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. The *Ka'bah* is located in the city of Makkah at the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East. One way to determine the precise direction of prayer

(called *al-qiblah*) is to use a compass. In North America, Muslims face northeast to locate the shortest path to Makkah.

Place:

The place where a person is going to recite his or her prayers should either belong to that person, or that person must have permission to pray in that area unless the place is public. The spot where the forehead touches the ground should be clean (*taahir*), and prostration must be done on earth or inedible plants (including paper or wood).

Purity of the body:

Just as the soul must be pure, concentrated, and calm before prayers, the body must also be free from impurities. Certain items are considered ritually impure and must be avoided, removed, or purified before the prayers. A specified washing (*wudhu*) must also be done before the prayers:

> **O you, who believe, when you intend to offer prayers, wash your faces and your hands from the elbows to the fingertips. Rub [with wet hands] your heads and your feet up to the ankles, and if you are in a state of sexual impurity [*jenaba*], purify yourself [by bathing your entire body]** (5:6).

If water is unavailable, dust may be used out of necessity. The Quran explains:

> **But if you are ill or on a journey and you come from the call of nature or have been in sexual contact with women and do not find water, then take clean sand and rub your faces and your hands. Allah does not want to place you in any difficulty, but He wants to purify you and to complete His favor on you that you may be thankful** (5:6).

Clothing:

During prayer, a man must wear enough clothing to cover his body, and a woman must cover her entire body (including the head and hair) except for the face and hands. Clothing worn during prayer must be clean and lawfully obtained; it must not be stolen or borrowed without permission.

The call to prayer (*adhaan*):

The call for prayer is highly recommended and is one of the distinguishing emblems of the Islamic faith. The call to prayer consists of two parts: the *adhaan* and the *iqaama*.

The person reciting the *adhaan* should stand facing the direction of prayer and say:

Allahu akbar.
Allah is the Greatest (4 times).

Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah.
I testify that there is no Allah but Allah (2 times).

Ashhadu anna Muhammadan-rasul Allah.
I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (2 times).

Ashhadu anna Alian walu'u Allah
I testify that Ali is the friend of Allah (2 times).[72]

Hayya 'alaa as-salaah.
Hasten to prayer (2 times).

Hayya 'alaa al-falaah.
Hasten to success (2 times).

Hayya 'alaa khayr al-'amal.
Hasten to the best of deeds (2 times).

Allahu akbar.
Allah is the Greatest (2 times).

Laa ilaaha illa Allah.
There is no Allah but Allah (2 times).

The *iqama* should be said immediately before the prayer. It is identical to the *adhaan* with three exceptions:

1. The initial phrase, "*Allahu akbar,*" is only said twice.
2. The final phrase, "*La ilaaha illa Allah,*" is only said once.

[72] This part is recommended not mandatory.

3. The phrase "*Qad qaamat as-salaah*" which means "prayer is being offered" should be said twice; it should be inserted after "*Hayya 'alaa khayr al-'amal* " which is repeated twice as well.

The prayers:

Each of the prayers consists of a specific number of units (*rak'ah*). The dawn prayer has two units, the noon and afternoon prayers have four units, the sunset prayer has three units, and the night prayer has four units. The simplest prayer to learn is the two-unit dawn prayer, which will be described here.

Once all of the preconditions above have been fulfilled, and the person intending to offer the prayer is facing the proper direction (*qiblah*), and a sincere intention has been made for that particular prayer (in this case the dawn prayer), then the prayer may be begun. The hands should be placed behind the ears and the following said:

Allahu akbar.
Allah is the Greatest.[73]

The first chapter of the Quran (*al-fatiha*) must be recited:

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[73] Saying the prayers in Arabic is highly recommended. However, if a person is absolutely unable to say the prayers in Arabic, the prayers may be said in another language that the person understands, for example, English.

Bismillah ar-rahmaan ar-rahim.	**In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful.**
Al-hamdu lillaahi rabb al'aalamin.	**Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.**
Ar-rahmaan ar-rahim.	**The Compassionate, the Merciful.**
Maaliki yawm-id-din.	**Master of the Day of Judgment.**
Iyyaaka na'budu wa iyyaaka nasta'in. Ihdina-s-siraat al-mustaqim.	**You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help. Guide us the straight path.**
Siraat alladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayr al-maghdubi 'alayhim wa laa adh-dhaalin.	**The path of those whom You have blessed, not of those on whom is Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.**

Next, another full chapter of the Quran must be recited. The example given below is the chapter entitled, **"The Oneness of Allah."**[74]

[74] *Al-tawhid,* c.112.

Bismillah al-rahmaan al-rahim.	**In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate, the Most Merciful.**
Qul huwa allahu ahad Allahu-s-samad Lam yalid wa lam yulad Wa lam yakun lahu kufwaan ahad.	**Say, He is Allah, the One Allah, the Eternal He begets not, nor was He begotten and there is nothing comparable to Him.**

At this point, "*Allahu akbar*" should be said and the person should bow, placing the hands on the knees and keeping the back straight. While bowing, the following should be recited:

Subhaana rabbi al-athim wa bihamdih.	**Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise be to Him.**

Then, while resuming the standing position, the following should be said:

Sami'a Allahu liman hamidah.	**Allah hears the one who praises Him.**

Then, "*Allahu akbar*" is said, and the person does prostration (*sujud*) on the ground. In *sujud*, the forehead, palms of the hands,

knees, and tips of the toes must all touch the ground. The following must be said one or three times:

Subhaana rabbi al-a'laa wa bihamdih.

Glory be to my Exalted Lord, and praise be to Him.

"*Allahu akbar*" should be said, and the person should sit up on his or her knees and say:

Astaghfirullaaha rabbi wa atubu ilayh.

I seek forgiveness of Allah, my Lord, and turn toward Him.

Again, "*Allahu akbar*" should be said and *sujud* repeated. Then, the person should stand up and repeat the same process (*e.g.* recite the first chapter of the Quran; recite another chapter of the Quran, bow, and do the two *sujuds*). Finally, sitting on the knees, the following must be said:

Ashhadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah, wahdahu la sharikalah wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan, abdahu warasuluh.

I testify that there is no Allah but Allah, alone without associate, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

Allahumma salli 'alaa Muhammadin wa aal-i Muhammad.	**O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.**
Assalaamu 'alayka ayyuha an-nabiy sa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu.	**Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.**
Assalaamu 'alayna wa 'alaa 'ibaad allahi-s-saalihi.	**Peace be upon us, and upon all the righteous Servants of Allah.**
Assalaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu.	**Peace be upon you, and the mercy of Allah, and His blessings.**

It is recommended that "*Allahu akbar*" be said three times by raising each hand to each side of the face. This action concludes the two-unit prayer. However, it may be followed by supplications or other recitations.

II
FASTING (*SAWM*)

Almost every religion encourages some form of fasting. Prophet Muhammad and the prophets before him all called upon their followers to fast. The Quran states, **"O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may be pious and learn self-restraint"** (2:183). Islam prescribes complete fasting. It requires complete abstinence from food, drink (including water), smoking, and sexual activity. Hence, from dawn until the time of the sunset prayer, one must abstain.

Although fasting is recommended on other significant Islamic dates, it is, however, required every day during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The month of Ramadan is revered and honored by all Muslims. It was on a particular night called "The Night of Destiny" (*laylat al-qadr*), during the month of Ramadan that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet. Muslims believe that on this night, every year, Allah determines the fate of each person for the year to come. Therefore, worshipping on "The Night of Destiny" is considered, **"Better than a thousand months"** (97:3). Although the exact night of the "Night of Destiny" is not known, Islamic scholars approximate the date to fall on either the 19^{th}, 21^{st}, 23^{rd}, 25^{th}, or 27^{th} of the month of Ramadan. Therefore, Muslims copiously worship Allah on these specific nights. The Quran states:

> **Verily, We have sent it [Quran] down on the Night of Destiny and what would make you know what the Night of Destiny is? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months; He sends down the angels, and the Spirit during it by His will for every matter; Peace! Till the rising of the dawn** (97).

As with prayers, the benefits of fasting are innumerable. Fasting strengthens one's willpower, teaches discipline, encourages sympathy with the poor, breaks harmful habits, strengthens one's health, and establishes a sense of religious brotherhood and sisterhood. However, the strongest benefits are spiritual. Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, said, *"Fasting is to deepen and strengthen faith."* Fasting sharpens the spiritual awareness and inspires a sense of gratitude toward Allah.

Apart from refraining from food and drink, Muslims are also encouraged, during the month of Ramadan, to give additional charity toward the poor and the needy.

III-IV
ALMSGIVING (*ZAKAAT* AND *KHUMS*)

The act of sharing and providing others who are less fortunate is not only mandated upon Muslims but is also considered one of the noblest acts that can bring a person closer to Allah. Giving charity benefits the individual and society; it purifies the soul from stinginess and meanness. The Quran says, **"Take alms from their wealth in order to purify and sanctify them"** (9:103). From a moral perspective, the obligation to pay the obligatory charities is no less important than the obligation to pray. Whenever the Quran refers to people who pray, it also refers to people who pay obligatory charities. Charity is not considered as a gift for the poor but rather a right for the poor. The Quran states, **"And in their properties [fortunate ones] is the right of the beggar and the destitute"**(51:19).

Every monetary or material possession that people acquire comes through the generosity of Allah. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was known to have received her sustenance unconditionally:

> **Every time Zachariah entered the sanctuary to visit her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, 'O Mary! From where did you get this?' She said, 'This is from Allah; verily, Allah**

> **provides sustenance to whomever He wills without limit** (3:37).

Although people must work to earn a living, Allah is the one who determines the amount and the form of sustenance they will receive throughout their lifetime. Therefore, when people are directed to return some of their wealth toward charity, in reality they are not relinquishing their own property, but merely returning what Allah has lent them. Allah said, **"O you who believe! Spend out of what We have provided for you"** (2:254), and **"Surely those who recite the Book of Allah and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them secretly and openly hope for a gain which will not perish"** (35:29).

The supply of provision and sustenance not only applies to humankind but all kingdoms of Allah's creation (i.e., animal and plant). The Quran says, **"Many are the creatures that carry not their own provision; Allah provides for them and for you"** (29:60).

Money that comes from obligatory charities (*zakaat* and *khums*) provides security and dignity within society by providing for the needy, bridging the gap between the rich and the poor, and eliminating poverty. The money collected is used for food, shelter, education, health care, orphanages, libraries, transportation systems, and other public services. A community in which everyone pays their dues (*zakaat* and *khums*) will be successful. On the other hand, a community in which people do not pay the *zakaat* and *khums* will fall apart. Prophet Muhammad said:

> *My community will continue to live fairly if they are faithful to each other, return deposits to their owners, and give alms [zakaat] to the poor. But if*

> *they do not fulfill these duties, they will encounter famine and scarcity.*[75]

Imam Ali said:

> *Allah the Glorified has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever the destitute remain hungry, it is because some rich persons have denied him his share.*[76]
>
> *When charity is delivered out of the hand of its owner, it says five things: at first, I was perishing and you gave me life I was insignificant and you made me greatness. I was an enemy and you turned me into a friend. You used to protect me then, but now I will protect you up till the Day of Resurrection.*[77]

These traditions and legislations only refer to obligatory almsgiving; however, there is, in addition to alms, voluntary charity of every kind—money, words, or deeds. Voluntary charity is called *sadaqa*. Like *zakaat* and *khums*, benefits both the individual and society. Prophet Muhammad said, "*Give charity and cure your sick persons by it because charity can surely remove your bad fortunes and ailments, and it causes prolongation of your lifetimes and increases your rewards.*"[78]

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[75] *Wasaa'il ash-Shi'a*, vol. 6 p. 13.
[76] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence).
[77] *Al-Ithna'ashariyyah*, p. 23.
[78] *Kanz al-'Ummal*, vol. 6 p. 31.

SPECIFICS OF THE *ZAKAT* AND *KHUMS*

1. *Zakaat* is a type of almsgiving, that must be paid yearly on the following items, if they are possessed in sufficient quantities: wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cows, and sheep.

2. *Khums* should be paid yearly on 20% of the excess profit that a person acquires. *Excess profit* refers to the profit that remains after a person has paid for food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities for himself or herself and the immediate family. It is advisable that Khums be given to an authorized person so that it can be distributed in the appropriate way. *Khums* must also be paid on six other items, for example, gems obtained while diving. This case, however, in modern society tend to be rare.

Khums has been ordained in the Quran:

> **And know that whatever profit you may attain, one fifth of it is assigned to Allah and the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger] and the orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer, if you have believed in Allah and that which We sent down to our servant [Muhammad]** (8:41).

V
PILGRIMAGE TO THE CITY OF MAKKAH (*HAJJ*)

Every Muslim who is able must make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the city of Makkah at least once in his or her life. This pilgrimage occurs every year during *Dhul qidah* and *Dhul Hijjah*, the 11th and 12th months of the Islamic lunar calendar. Those who make the pilgrimage follow in the footsteps of Abraham, "the father of the prophets." Four thousand years ago, Abraham along with his wife, Hagar, and his son, Ishmael, set out on a vast journey wandering through Babylon, Syria, and Arabia. They crossed vast hills, rivers, and deserts until arriving in the land of Makkah where Abraham received a revelation from Allah. The Quran states:

> **And remember when we showed Abraham the site of the House saying... Do not associate with Me anything, and purify My house for those who circle around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim among the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every remote path that they may witness the benefits for them and mention the name of Allah during the appointed days over what He has given them** (22:26-28).

Abraham and Ishmael were instructed by Allah to raise the cubic structure, the *Ka'bah*. According to the Quran, it is the, **"First house made for mankind"** (3:95). Its original foundation was built at the dawn of creation by Prophet Adam. Abraham was then ordered to proclaim the pilgrimage to humankind. Unconcerned as to whom would hear his voice in the desertland of Mekkah. Abraham climbed atop a nearby mountain and proclaimed to humanity the divine message of the *hajj*. This call has passed through the distance of time, and it still reverberates to the millions of Muslims around the globe who answer Allah's call to make their pilgrimage.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *HAJJ*

The *hajj* is the supreme symbol of universal brotherhood, and it is the greatest annual congregation in the world. Every year in Makkah, millions of Muslims from diverse origins stand shoulder-to-shoulder, clad in the barest of materials (two pieces of white cloth) and perform the same rituals. Not one person can be distinguished from another on the basis of wealth, lineage, or power. The most powerful leaders are on the same level as the general public. All artificial or human-imposed distinctions among humankind are lifted, and people have, for the span of a few days, the opportunity to know each other solely as brothers and sisters of humanity.

The *hajj* also develops the human soul. Every human being (whether aware of it or not) is traveling toward Allah, and the essential part of the spiritual development in life is to recognize the returning journey. The *hajj* not only represents a physical journey,

but also compels the pilgrim to demonstrate his or her willingness to leave behind everything in his or her life for Allah.

Allah has made it known that one of the ways to approach Him for forgiveness is to journey to His house—the *Ka'bah* in Makkah. Once, Imam Ali was with a group of his followers in the vicinity of the *Ka'bah* when they saw a man holding the cloth cover of the *Ka'bah* while supplicating, *"O Keeper of the House! This house is Your house, and this guest is Your guest. Each guest sees goodness from its host. Tonight, let Your goodness be the forgiving of my sins."* Imam Ali asked his followers, *"Did you hear the words of this man?"* They said, *"Yes, we did."* Imam Ali replied, *"Almighty Allah is more forgiving than to drive away His guests."*

The sense of equality and humanity that is present during the *hajj* should be reflected in one's own everyday life. The person who has experienced the *hajj* ought to return home freed from the erroneous notions of race and class that often are prevalent in some societies. For many Muslims, the *hajj* serves as an enormous convention or conference in which information is exchanged and problems are solved. Since the advent of Islam, the *hajj* has been one of the major unifying cultural factors for Muslims. This is based on the fact that every year Muslim delegates from every civilization meet in one place to discuss and solve Islamic matters.

THE RITES OF *HAJJ*

The beginning of the pilgrimage is marked by proclaiming, "*Labbayk, Allahumma, Labbayk*" which means "I am here, O

Lord, I am here!" This should be followed by, "You, Who have no partner—I am here! Surely all praise and blessings are Yours, and the Kingdom—I am here, O Lord, I am here!"

During the *hajj*, the millions of pilgrims present engage in circling the *Ka'bah* (a practice called *tawwaf*). The pilgrim's circling (*tawwaf*) around Allah's House symbolizes one's dependence and needed assistance from Allah. The revolutions (*tawwaf*) also illustrate how one's ultimate being constantly revolves around Allah.

After *tawwaf*, the pilgrims scamper between two small mountains called Safa and Marwa. This rite reenacts Hagar's search for water for her infant son Ishmael. Alone in the desert, Hagar and her baby were in desperate need for water. She ran back and forth looking desperately for some hint of moisture in the desert sands. Seeing Hagar's effort, Allah produced for her the spring of Zamzam—a spring of cool, pure water which gushed forth at Ishmael's feet and continues to flow until this very day. By imitating Hagar's search, the pilgrims remember her plight, but also assimilate a message within themselves that they cannot sit and wait for Allah's blessings to unfold magically upon them. Rather, if people are in need of something, they should work hard for it and hope for the munificence of Allah.

The most significant day of the pilgrimage is the Day of Arafat. Arafat is a desert outside the city of Makkah in which all the pilgrims must stand from noon to sunset and commune with Allah. The time spent in Arafat marks the real essence of the *hajj*; Prophet Muhammad said, *"The hajj is Arafat."* In Arafat, pilgrims leave behind all material possessions except for the two pieces of cloth worn during their pilgrimage—a symbol of returning to the same condition in which one was born. The vast gathering consists of millions of people all dressed alike standing in the same place at the same time; this represents the true origin and fate of humanity. We are born from dust; we live for a short while, and then we are

resurrected from dust again. The scene of Arafat resembles what the Day of Resurrection will be like; countless of individuals are pieced back together from dust to withstand judgment by Allah.

At a place called Mina, on the outskirts of Mekkah, the pilgrims throw pebbles at Satan. By stoning pillars, which are physical representations of Satan, pilgrims demonstrate their continuing struggle and treatment of fighting against Satan, who has sworn to be the enemy of humankind. Pebble throwing is also another historical reenactment of Prophet Abraham and Ishmael's sacrifices for Allah. Abraham, along with his son Ishmael, were on their way to fulfill the command of Allah; the slaying of his son, Ishmael. Prophet Abraham encountered Satan three times disguised as a man. Satan attempted to discourage Abraham. Instead of listening to Satan's dissuasions, Abraham threw stones at him in each of these three areas.

At the end of the *hajj*, each pilgrim sacrifices an animal like Abraham did in lieu of his son. The sacrifice denotes the pilgrim's willingness to adhere to Allah's commandments unconditionally. The meat of the animal must not be wasted; one-third may be kept for personal consumption, the other two-thirds should be divided equally among friends and the indigent.

VI
STRIVING (*JIHAD*)

The literal meaning of *jihad* is "to strive." More importantly, it means to progress in all aspects of one's life. Although the word *jihad* is used by the western media with militant connotations, in truth, it covers the vast range of human enterprises: family life, work, spiritual development, and justified military defense.

The most important *jihad* is the struggle to purify the soul, and this *jihad* far outweighs any military *jihad*. Prophet Muhammad once met a group of soldiers returning home from a defensive battle and said, *"Welcome to the people who have concluded the minor jihad [struggle]."* Astonished, the soldiers asked, *"Was this [military battle] the minor jihad? Then what is the major jihad?"* Prophet Muhammad replied, *"The major jihad is the jihad to purify one's self."*

The beginning steps of *jihad* are to purify the soul by restraining one's self from committing sins that corrupt the soul. One must control material desires, overt selfishness, and remain uninfluenced by forces (internal or external) that distract one from the remembrance of Allah. All the forms of worship in Islam such as prayers, fasting, and charity exist as a means to purify and perfect the soul. Only in the upward development of the soul will one find happiness in this life and in the next life. If the soul is unhappy, a person will be miserable, regardless of how materially wealthy he

or she may be. The Quran says, **"And by the soul and Him Who perfected it, then showed it what is right and what is wrong for it—indeed, he succeeds who purifies his soul, and, indeed, he fails who corrupts his soul"** (91:7). The soul is the essence of humankind; it is the element that will outlast this life and be judged in the next. One of the primary reasons humankind was placed in this world is to test and develop their souls.

Jihad also refers to the legitimate struggle to defend human rights, such as personal and religious freedom, as well as the defense of land, property, and families:

> **Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully and offensively waged, and surely Allah is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, "Our Lord is Allah..."** (22:39-40).

When people are being oppressed, Islam commands believers to defend the rights and integrity of people. Fighting in the form of defense is not only permitted but is required. The Quran explains, **"Fight against aggressors until oppression is stopped"** (2:193). *Jihad*, as a form of fighting, must be for just causes and to defend the freedom, liberty, and integrity of society:

> **And why do you not fight in the way of Allah and the utterly oppressed men, women, and children who are crying out, "O Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help"** (4:75).

Civilized countries today could not have achieved their stature without a war for independence and a struggle for freedom. Furthermore, such countries could not have retained their positions without a strong military development. In life, struggle will always exist between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and societies cannot progress if tyrants are left alone to do what they want to do.



VII-VIII
ENJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL
(*AMR BIL-MA'ROUF~NAHIY AN AL-MUNKAR*)

> Let there arise from you a group of people inviting what is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong; these are the ones who will be successful (3:104).

In order for religion to progress and society to flourish, people must initiate, advise, and attempt to guide each other toward righteousness by deterring each other away from misconduct. This action is mandatory for those who believe in Allah and the Day of Judgment. Giving sincere advice is not, as some may argue, meddling in someone's business; it is a valuable favor and one of the best forms of charity.



IX
SUPPORTING THOSE WHO WALK IN THE PATH OF ALLAH
(*TAWALLI LI AWLIYAA' ALLAH*)

This entire phrase means to be a friend and a helper of the righteous and pious people who maintain religion and believe in Allah. Specifically, it is directed to the prophets and *imams* (successors to the prophets), as well as those who work to establish order, justice, and religion on earth. The Quran states:

"And whoever takes Allah, His messenger, and those who have belief as protectors and guardians, then the party of Allah will be victorious" (5:56).

X
TURNING AWAY FROM THE ENEMIES OF ALLAH
(*TABAARI MIN A'DAA ALLAH*)

This phrase refers to the opposite of *tawalli li awliyaa' Allah.* Those who sincerely believe in Allah must dissociate themselves from those people who obstruct truth and justice and prevent the light of Allah from reaching others. The Quran states:

> **Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. It is regarding those who fought against you on account of religion and have driven you out of your homes and helped to drive you out that Allah forbids you to befriend them, and whoever will befriend them, then such are the wrongdoers** (60:8-9).

> **O you, who believe, take not for protectors and helpers those who take your religion as a mockery and fun from among those who received the scriptures before you, or from**

> **among the disbelievers, and fear Allah if you indeed are true believers** (5:57).
>
> **Let not the believers take the disbelievers as supporters and helpers and friends instead of the believers. And whoever does that will never be helped by Allah in any way** (3:28).

It is for the benefit of believers that Allah warns them against associating with unbelievers, tyrants, and enemies of Allah and humankind.

~ RELIGIOUS TEXTS ~

THE QURAN

The Quran is the last in a series of divine books (e.g., the Torah and the Gospel) revealed by Allah to humankind through the prophets. The Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years and consists of 114 chapters. The length of the Quran is comparable to that of the New Testament. The revelations were written by a group of people appointed by the Prophet. Imam Ali first compiled the Quran into a book form after the Prophet's death.

The Quran sheds light on many different aspects of life—legal, moral, social, political, economic, philosophical, mystical, and scientific, in addition to stories of previous prophets. Allah says, **"We have sent down to you the Book as an exposition of everything—a guidance, a mercy, and glad tidings for those who have submitted themselves to Allah as Muslims"** (16:89). Less rigid than prose, but more beautiful than poetry, its peculiar melody transcends all other forms of linguistic sounds and writings. The Quran speaks only the truth, and its directives are universal for all places, situations, and times. It is the completion of the earlier revelations such as the Old and New Testaments, and

it is the only divine revelation that exists in its original unchanged form. Allah said, **"Verily, it is We Who have sent down the Quran, and surely We will guard it from corruption"** (15:9). From the time of the Prophet until today, not one phrase of the Quran has been edited, altered, added, omitted, lost, distorted, or otherwise changed.

The Quran plays an important role in Muslim life. It constantly reminds Muslims of their duties, rights, obligations, and ultimate destiny. Muslims are invited to study, memorize, ponder, and reflect on the Quran, and then to implement its teachings. The chapters of the Quran contain the supreme divine wisdom that is meant for all seekers of truth—ordinary people, scholars, specialists, old, young, Muslims, and non-Muslims alike. It addresses all of humankind. Verses in the Quran attest to this fact by beginning with the words, **"O mankind!"** The Quran satisfies people with its symphony of words, science, narrations and intellectual discourse, and it fascinates the reader with its vast richness and depth.

SCIENCE AND THE QURAN

Many scientific facts and realities are present in the Quran. The Quran has proven not to contradict science. The creations of the embryological features are described vividly in the Quran. A careful comparison of this verse with the actual details of embryological development will reveal no contradictions:

> **And indeed We created man out of an extract of clay. Thereafter, We made him as mixed drops of the male and female fluids and lodged him in**

> **a safe lodging [womb of the mother]. Then We made the mixed drops into a clot [a piece of thick coagulated blood]. Then We made the clot into a little lump of flesh. Then We made out of that little lump of flesh bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. And then We brought it forth as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the best of creators** (23:12-14).

The creation of life, the earth, and the astronomical universe is also described in a way that parallels modern scientific theory. Many of the Quranic chapters are named after astronomical objects such as "The Star"[79] and "The Sun."[80] The Quran states:

> **Do not those who disbelieve know that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, and then We parted them? And We have made from water every living thing. Will they then not believe? And We have placed on the earth firm mountains, lest it should shake with them, and We placed therein-broad highways for them to pass through that they may be guided, and We have made the heaven a roof, safe, and well guarded. Yet they turn away from its signs. And He it is Who has created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, each in an orbit floating** (21:30-33).
>
> **By the sun and its brightness, and by the moon as it follows it, and by the day as it shows up in the sun's brightness, and by the night as it conceals it, and by the heavens and Him who**

[79] *An-Najm*/Chapter 53.
[80] *Ash-Shams*/Chapter 91.

> **built it, and by the earth and Him who spread it...** (9:1-6).

Although the people of the Prophet's time knew nothing about the lifetimes or mechanisms of the sun and stars, the Quran refers to the fact that stars exist for a fixed period of time:

> **And the sun runs on its fixed course for a term appointed. That is the decree of the Almighty, the Omniscient. And the moon, We have measured for it mansions to traverse till it returns like the old dried curved date-stalk. It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day. They all swim each in an orbit** (36:38).

Human beings are asked to ponder the creation of the universe and consider their role therein:

> **Truly, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day there are indeed signs for all who are endowed with insight, and who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and contemplate creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying] 'O Lord! You have not created all this without purpose! Glory be to You'** (3:191).

> **Are you more difficult to create or the heavens above** (79:27)?

Even the expansion of the universe is alluded to. The Quran states, **"With power did We construct the heavens; verily, We are able to expand the vastness of space thereof"**(51:47). The end of this universe is also described in these following passages taken from the Quran:

> **And remember the day when We will roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books. As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it. It is a promise binding upon Us. Truly, We shall do it** (21:104).

> **When the sun has wound around and lost its light and has been overthrown, and when the stars shall fall, and when the mountains shall be made to pass away...And when the seas shall become a blazing far or shall overflow...** (81:1-3,6).

> **When the Heaven is cleft asunder, and when the stars have fallen and scattered, and when the seas have burst forth...** (82:1-3).

> **When the Event befalls—and there can be no denying its befalling—it will bring low some, and others it will exalt. When the earth will be shaken with a terrible shaking, and the mountains will be powdered to dust so that they will become floating dust particles...** (56:1-6).

> **And they ask you concerning the mountains. Say, "My Lord will blast them and scatter them as particles of dust; then He shall leave it as a smooth, level plain. You will see therein nothing crooked or curved"** (20:105-107).

THE QUALITIES OF THE QURAN

And know that this Quran is an adviser who never deceives, a leader who never misleads, and a narrator who never speaks a lie. No one will sit beside this Quran but that when he rises he will achieve one addition or one diminution—addition in his guidance and elimination in his [spiritual] blindness. You should also know that no one will need any thing after [guidance from] the Quran and no one will be free from want before [guidance from] the Quran. Therefore, seek cure from it for your ailments and seek its assistance in your distresses. It contains a cure for the biggest diseases, namely, unbelief, hypocrisy, revolt, and misguidance. Pray to Allah through it and turn to Allah with its love. Do not ask the people through it. There is nothing like it through which the people should turn to Allah, the Sublime.[81]

THE SUPPLICATIONS TO ALLAH (*DU'A*)

Supplications and prayers (*du'a*) focus on the idea that human beings are in constant need of Allah. Even those who reach the

[81] *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence), sermon 176.

peak of wealth, knowledge, strength, and dignity are still in need of Allah. The word *du'a* itself means to call out to Allah. *Du'a* is of equal importance to people inflicted with calamities and hardships, as well as for those living in comfort and abundance. Speaking with Allah through *du'a* defends oneself against adversity and tribulation, and it leads one to salvation and relief. Islam encourages its followers to offer *du'a* constantly; either using their personal words from the heart, or repeating some of the inspirational words of the Prophet and his successors that have been written.

Allah has guaranteed His servants that He will answer their prayers. The Quran states, **"And your Lord says, "Call on me, I will answer your prayer"** (40:60). Allah says:

> **When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close to them. I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls upon Me. Let them also with a will listen to My call and believe in Me that they walk in the right way** (2:186).

DU'A KUMAIL*

A man named Kumail ibn Ziyad once asked Imam Ali ibn abi-Talib for a way to approach Allah. In response, Imam Ali gave him this prayer and told him to recite it every day if he could, or if it were possible recite it once a week. If he could not recite it once a week, Imam Ali asked him to recite it once a year; and, if that were not possible, Imam Ali asked him to recite it at least once in

* An example of an Islamic supplication.

his lifetime. This prayer became known as *"Du'a Kumail"* (the prayer for Kumail). Many Muslims recite the prayer once a week on Thursday night. The prayer is as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate,
the Most Merciful.

O Allah, I ask You by Your Mercy which embraces all things.

By Your Strength, through which You dominate all things, toward which all things are humble, and before which all things are lowly.

By Your Invincibility, through which You overwhelm all things.

By Your Might, which nothing can resist.

By Your Greatness, which has filled all things.

By Your Power, which towers over all things.

By Your Face, which subsists after annihilation of all things.

By Your Names, which have filled the foundations of all things.

By Your Knowledge, which encompasses all things; and
by the Light of Your Face, through which all things are illumined!

O Light! O All-Holy!
O First of the first and Last of the last!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which tear apart safeguards!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which bring down adversities!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which alter blessings!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which hold back supplication!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which dash all hopes!

O Allah, forgive me the sins which bring about tribulation!

O Allah, forgive me every sin I have committed and every mistake I have made!

O Allah, verily I seek nearness to You through remembrance of You, I seek intercession from You with Yourself, and I ask You through Your Munificence, to bring me nearer to Your Mercy, to bless me with gratitude to You and to inspire me with Your remembrance...



~ OTHER ISLAMIC ISSUES ~

LEADERSHIP OF THE MUSLIMS AFTER PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Quran emphasizes the role and significance of leadership in Islam. Allah states, **"And remember the day on which we will call together all human beings with their leaders [*Imams*]"** (17:71). Therefore, Prophet Muhammad was concerned with appointing a successor after himself by the command of his Lord. Allah commanded the Prophet, **"O Prophet! Proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord [the succession of Imam Ali], for if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message, and Allah will protect you from the people"**(5:67). This revelation came upon the Prophet at a major crossroad between Makkah and Madina called "Ghadir Khum." The Prophet had just concluded his Pilgrimage (*hajj*) and was returning home, along with 110,000 pilgrims, when he received the command by Allah to appoint Imam Ali as his successor. After the Prophet revealed the command before the people, the Quran concluded with its last and final verse, **"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor on you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion"** (5:3). The companions of the Prophet paid

allegiance to Imam Ali and accepted him as the caliph after the Prophet.

However, seventy days after the monumental incident, Prophet Muhammad left this life. Confusion and disarray overtook some Muslims over the successor of the Muslim community. There were two main groups; one that consisted of the family of the Prophet (Bani Hashim) and his prominent companions, and the other being the prominent companions of the Prophet. The first group believed that the Muslim leadership had already been established by divine ordinance[82] and iterated by the Prophet.[83] This group later became known as the "*Shia*[84] *of Ali.*" The second group believed that the Prophet left the issue of succession open to the Muslim community. This group decided that the leadership of the Muslim community was based on consultation (*shura*). Members of the second group suggested that Ali would be too young (age 33) to assume leadership. In their opinion, prophethood and succession (caliphate) should not be vested in one family.

In a hasty meeting at Saqifa Bani Sa'ida in Madina, Abu Bakr ibn abi Quhafah assumed leadership (632-634). After Abu Bakr's death, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644) assumed leadership; followed by 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (644-656), and then finally Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-661). After the *khilafa* of Ali, two dynasties followed: the Umayyids and the Abbasids.

[82] Quran 5:67, 26:214, 5:55, 4:59.
[83] *Sahih Bukhari*, Book on Outstanding Traits, hadith #3430; Battles hadith #4064; Sahih Muslim, Book of the Merits of the Companions, hadith #4418; al-Tirmidhi, Book on Outstanding Traits, #3664; ibn Majah, Book on the Introduction, 112 and 118; Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal 1:173, 175, 177, 179, 182, 184, and 185.
[84] Literal meaning of Shia, means followers.

SOCIAL LIFE IN ISLAM

Islam places tremendous emphasis on the social aspects of life. Islamic practices are not only confined to the spiritual dimensions but also to the social environment. For example, Islam encourages people to perform their daily prayers in congregation. Praying in congregation strengthens the ties between people by giving them the opportunity to interact with each other and discuss their issues in a religious compound. Once a blind man came to the Prophet and said that no one was able to take him to the mosque to attend the congregational prayer. Prophet Muhammad told him to stretch a thread from his home to the mosque and use it to go to the mosque for congregational prayer.

Similarly, fasting has many social aspects; it causes Muslims to feel the pains of starvation, and the agony of the poor and the deprived. It encourages the fortunate ones to extend their hands to the indigent.

The *hajj* undoubtedly is the largest religious and social convention that congregates millions of people from around the globe into one arena to strengthen their ties and exchange ideas and opinions to improve their situations.

[illegible] and *zakaat (charity)* also plays an important social role in Islam. The giving of *khums* and *zakaat* holds Muslims responsible for bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil are a social duty that falls on the shoulders of each and every individual in an Islamic society. A Muslim promotes goodness, kindness, peace, and justice; a good Muslim fights oppression, corruption, and evil. Islam, in practice, is truly a social religion.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Another aspect of Islamic social life is marriage and the establishment of a family. Islam encourages its followers to get married and avoid celibacy. Prophet Muhammad said, *"The person who marries gains half of his faith; then he must fear Allah for the other remaining half."*[85] In another tradition, the Prophet said, *"He who wishes to be clean and purified when he meets Allah should marry and have a spouse."*[86]

The Quran describes the union between men and women:

> **And among His signs is that he created for you spouses from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily, in that are signs for those who reflect** (30:21).

The verse establishes three pillars of a successful marriage. First, marriage provides an emotional and social shelter whereby the husband and the wife find stability and security financially, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. The second pillar of a successful marriage is the love between the spouses. Marriage that is not based on love is apt to fail in the future. The third pillar is the mercy between the spouses, which leads to mutual understanding, appreciation, respect, and the caring for one another.

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[85] *Al-Kafi*, vol. 5 p. 328.
[86] *Man laa Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, vol. 3 p. 385.

Although heavily discouraged, divorce is permissible in Islam. Divorce in Islam is only used in dire cases where the marriage has no possibility of progress or development. Allah does not want a couple to remain in misery and sustain emotional, physical, and financial damage. Thus, Allah explains the laws and rules of divorce in a chapter of the Quran called "Divorce."[87] Islam encourages reconciliation between the spouses. Their families and friends have the responsibility to counsel the couple as much as possible, but if the attempt to save the marriage ultimately fails, then the last resort is divorce. After divorce, there is a waiting period called *iddah. Iddah* represents a time of reflection or emotional recuperation for the couple; it provides an opportunity to heavily reconsider their decision. The three-month waiting period also provides ample time to confirm the possibility of pregnancy. Most couples return during the Iddah period; however, if the period elapses and the couple shows no interest in returning to each other, then the divorce will be finalized.

Part of the Islamic social life is to have high regards for kinship. Kindness and respect for one's parents are considered one of the most notable qualities in Islam:

> **The Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents, whether one or both of them attains old age in your life. Say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor, and out of kindness lower to them the wing of humility and say, 'My Lord, bestow on them Thy mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood'** (23:24).

[87] *At-Talaq*/Chapter 65.

Respect and kindness toward one's parents is as important as worship itself. Imam al-Sadiq said, *"He who glares at his parents with wrathful eyes, although they have been unjust to him, Allah will not accept his prayers unless he repents."*[88] Respecting one's mother is particularly important. The Prophet said, *"Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother. Treat kindly your mother, and be kind to your father."*[89]

Imam al-Sadiq has narrated:

> *He who wishes Allah, Almighty and Glorious, to lighten the agonies of death should have regard for his kinship and treat his parents with goodness. Then Allah will make the agonies of death easy for him, and he will not be stricken by poverty in his life at all.*[90]

In general, humankind should all serve one another whether they are related or not. Prophet Muhammad said, *"He who decreases a grief out of the agonies for his Muslim brother, Allah will decrease for him a grief out of the agonies of the hereafter."*[91] He also said, *"People are the dependants of Allah for sustenance. So the most beloved person with Allah is the one who is helpful to the dependents of Allah and makes the family members of a house happy."*[92] As a social responsibility, Islam also encourages its followers to help the needy. Imam al-Sadiq said:

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[88] *Usul al-Kafi*, 2:349.
[89] *Al-Kafi*, 2:162.
[90] *Safinat al-bihar*, vol. 2 p. 553.
[91] *Shahab al-Akbar*, p. 194.
[92] *al-Kafi*, vol. 2 p. 164.

> *Whoever satiates a hungry believer so that the one is satisfied fully, neither a human being among people nor a near-stationed angel nor a divine messenger knows how great his reward is in the Hereafter except Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*
>
> *Feeding a hungry Muslim is among the means of forgiveness.*[93]

Even people who are not indigent should still be assisted in any possible way. The Quran states, *"He who is referred to by his Muslim brother [to borrow] but does not give him a loan, Allah will forbid him from entering Paradise on the day when the righteous will be recompensed."*[94]

WOMEN IN ISLAM

It is often stated that Islam considers a woman to be the more inferior human being, and even Prophet Muhammad has been reputed as a misogynist. However, upon an in-depth examination of the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet, one finds this to be a misleading accusation. The Prophet was greatly aware of women's rights. He fought actively to respond to them through legislation and practices.

An entire chapter of the Quran entitled **"Women"** discusses a woman's spirituality, in addition to her domestic and social rights. The chapter begins with this, **"O mankind! Be dutiful to your**

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[93] *al-Kafi*, vol. 2 p. 201.
[94] *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 76 p. 369.

Lord Who created you from a single soul, and He created its mate out of it, and from them both He created many men and women" (4:1).

Oftentimes, Islam has commonly been depicted and judged by the misconduct of some Muslims, rather than the content and philosophy of its teachings. Islam equalizes men and women in their creation, religious obligations, honor, and dignity. Islam has recognized women as an integral part of life. However, there are natural differences in the peculiarities of each gender; hence, they require varying guidelines. The female, as a mother, differs in her personality than that of the man, as a father. For each gender there is a specified message in life.

Islam innovated social and individual rights for women, and it has accredited women as full partners in life. She is entitled to pursue an education. No career is closed to women, unless it interferes with their dignity, respect, and chastity. Islam enables a woman to own and dispose of her property without the consent of her father or husband. She is able to contract and manage her own business affairs, as well as to earn and manage her own money. Islam entitles her to an inheritance as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife. She has the right to deny or accept marriage proposals. Muslim women have the full right to choose their own husbands without pressure or intimidation. An arranged marriage, without the consent or acknowledgment of a woman, is unlawful in Islam. Furthermore, her marriage dower is solely for her. She is entitled to vote (which is considered to be a religious duty) and to give her opinion or opposition to issues. The Quran says, **"O Prophet! When believing women come to you to give you political and religious allegiance... then accept their allegiance...** (60:12). Her penalty in a civil offense is the same as a man's. If she is harmed, she is entitled to just compensation.

The following are verses from the Quran that illustrate women's rights in society:

> **There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large, a legal share** (4:7).
>
> **O You who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with harshness, and live with them honorably. If you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing and that Allah brings through it a great deal of good** (4:19).
>
> **For men there is reward for what they have earned, and for women there is reward for what they have earned** (4:32).
>
> **Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he or she is a true believer, verily to him We will give a good life in this world, with respect, contentment, and lawful provision, and We shall certainly pay them a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do** (16:97).

Islam requires men and women to be conservative in their attire and behavior. However, the attire for men and women vary. Islam does not permit women to display their physical appearance in society. When Muslim women are among the public, they are required to cover themselves modestly. The term used for modest covering is known as *hejab*; it includes the covering of hair as well as the contour of the body, except the hands and face.[95]

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[95] Quran 33:59, 33:53, and 24:31.

Modest dress is a form of protection. It helps maintain chastity by allowing men and women to avoid temptations. When women cover themselves, they provide dimensions of moral character and dignity; not only for themselves, but also for society. Most importantly, it is used to protect women from being victimized. It is well noted that throughout history women have been victims of physical, mental, and emotional abuse within societies. Many societies exploit and dishonor women; Islam wants to shield their honor and dignity by protecting their physical nature.

Besides protecting the honor of women, religions want to inculcate unto men the importance of women in the sphere of life. Men are to regard women in a dignified manner and value them as human beings. The acknowledgment of a woman should not be based on her physical appearance or structure. Acknowledgment must be focused on her character, intelligence, and moral qualities.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ISLAM

Islam has laid the fundamental and universal rights for humanity. Essential human rights have been guaranteed and conferred by Allah. Such rights are an important ingredient of the human creation and honor. Allah says, ***"And indeed we have honored the children of Adam"*** (17:70).

The rights guaranteed by Islam include the right to life, justice, equality, safety, well-being, and freedom; additionally, respect for women's honor and dignity is important. Islam stresses that humankind originated from one person; therefore, race, color, and ethnicity are not factors for social privileges or extended rights. Every person is entitled to respect and equal opportunity. An

integral part of the Islamic faith is to recognize, accept, and practice the rights of humankind. To do otherwise would be considered an injustice. The verdict in the Quran is unequivocal for those who fail to do so. The Quran states, **"Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down are the disbelievers"** (5:44).

Human life is sacred and cannot be taken away without justification. Once the sanctity of the human soul is violated by a killing, then in the words of Allah, *the sanctity of all humankind would have been violated.* Allah states, **"Whoso slay a soul not to retaliate for soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, should be as if he had slain mankind altogether"** (5:32). Islam, in all cases, protects and defends the life of infants, children, and elderly people.

Islam considers feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, sheltering the homeless, adopting orphans, and treating the sick and wounded, regardless of race or color, are the essential qualities of the Islamic faith. Allah says, **"Do you see the one who denies the reckoning such as one who shuns the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So grief to the worshippers who do not pray with their hearts, but only wished to be seen. Those who turn away from neighborly needs"** (107: 1-7).

Examples of human rights:

- Sanctity of people's lives and property. The Prophet said, *"Your lives and properties are forbidden [from violation] to one another till you meet your Lord on the Day of Resurrection."*

- Freedom of expression. Every individual is privileged with the right to freedom of thought and expression. However,

the freedom should not be exploited in disseminating mischief or agony within a society. Therefore, freedom of expression is not extended to those who use abusive and offensive language. Islam puts great emphasis on protecting the dignity and reputation of people. The Quran states, **"And indeed We have honored the children of Adam"** (17:17).

- Personal freedom. An individual is considered innocent until a legitimate court proves one to be guilty. An individual is assumed truthful in speech and deeds until proven otherwise. No individual or group should be punished for the crime committed by another individual. The Quran states, **"Nor can one who bears burdens bear the burden of another"** (35:18).

- Political protest. The Quran instructs believers not to sit idle in face of injustice, corruption, evildoers, and oppressors. Allah says, **"And incline not toward those who do wrong, lest the fire should touch you"** (11:113). The Prophet states, *"Whoever offers help to an oppressor in his oppressor would come on the Day of Reckoning written on his forehead, despaired from Allah's mercy."*[96] Islam encourages people to defy tyranny. The Quran states, **"Allah does not love evil talk in public, unless it is by someone who has been injured thereby"** (4:148).

- Religious freedom. Religion, ideology, and philosophy should not be imposed on an individual against their will. **"Let there be no coercion in faith, truly the right way had been clearly distinct from error"** (2:256). Followers of all religions and sects have the right to worship and conduct their religious rites in an uninhibited atmosphere. The Prophet said this about the non-Muslim citizens in a

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[96] Kanz al-Ummal #14950.

Muslim state, *"One who kills a man under covenant will never smell the fragrance of Paradise."*

- Right to a standard means of living. All humankind has an equal right for aid and assistance for the basic necessities in life such as food, drink, shelter, clothing, and medication. This is a promise Allah made to the first man, **"Verily you have between [a promise from us] that you will never be hungry therein, nor naked, and you will suffer not from thirst therein, nor from the suns heat"** (20:118-119). The poor have an inalienable right of living upon the rich. The Quran states, **"And in their wealth there is acknowledged right for the needy and destitute."** (51:19).

- Equality before law. All citizens, regardless of social class, are equal within the law. There are no dignitaries who can go unpunished for their crimes in Islam; no one is exempted from the law.

ISLAMIC LAW AND PUNISHMENT

Before speaking of the law and punishment in Islam, many premises must be introduced regarding Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic ideology stipulates that Allah is the main source of Islamic law. These laws were revealed to all of the divine messengers in different eras and geographical places, according to the intellectual progress of the various societies. Thus, upon the coming of the Quran, Allah's laws were culminated as the universal legislation to

guide humankind. Therefore, Islamic law is not only bound by time or place, the laws are designed to cater to the different needs of the human race for eternity.

The Islamic law of punishment is based on prevention, not retribution. Islam cares to prevent criminal acts before they happen in order to maintain the peace of society. These laws are dynamic in that they are everlasting, not bound by individualistic interests. Islamic laws take into consideration the general interest of society. Allah speaks about the punishment of criminals by saying, **"O you who believe, the law of equality in punishment is prescribed for you in case of murder, but if the killer is forgiven by the relatives of the killed against blood money, then adhering to it with fairness and payment of the blood money to the heir should be made in fairness. This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord"** (2:178). Islam tries to combat crime and terror actively; however, it leaves room for mercy and forgiveness, emphasizing the human nature of people to commit unlawful acts. Islam teaches its followers to learn mercy and forgiveness from their Lord.

Islamic law is subject to the inherited rights of life. In order for the Islamic law to be judged and administered properly, all aspects (rights) of life have to be available for people as a whole in order for the judicial system to be incorporated. Islam commands societies and individuals alike to promote social justice, equality, and to maintain distribution of wealth. Islamic rule can only be applied when a society has adequate food, shelter, clothing, and employment. Furthermore, Islamic rule is only possible if an equal opportunity for education is possible. It is also important for matrimony to be possible. Islam rule endeavors to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots. Islam could then stand firmly against any person that attempts to terrorize or jeopardize the safety and security of society.

MOSQUE (*MASJID*)

Mosques are places of worship used by Muslims. Islam encourages people to perform their prayers in mosques. It also encourages people to participate in building mosques. Prophet Muhammad said, "*Whoever builds a mosque, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise.*" Mosques plays a vital role in Muslim life; in addition to the five daily congregational prayers and the recommended prayers, the mosque also accommodates Muslims during the Friday noon prayers and on the *'eid* holidays. Mosques are considered sacred places; men and women who are ritually impure may not enter them until they have ritually cleansed themselves. In addition, mosques should not be sold or defiled. The Quran states:

> **The mosques of Allah shall be maintained only by those who believe in Allah and the last day, perform prayers, and give zakaat and fear none but Allah. It is they who surely are on true guidance** (9:18).

The first mosque built by Prophet Muhammad was called "Qoba'a," and it was located on the outskirts of Madina. However, the holiest of all mosques and the first house of worship that was built on earth was *al-Masjid al-Haram*, the sacred mosque in Makkah. The second holiest mosque is the Prophet's Mosque (in Madina) which was built after the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madina.

Mosques have many distinctive features. There is the *musallah* (prayer hall), the *minbar* (pulpit where the preacher or *imam* stands

to deliver his sermon), and the *mihrab* (the niche that faces the direction of the *Ka'bah* in Makkah, *al-qiblah*). Even though the presence of Allah is everywhere, the Quran states, **"To Allah belong the East and the West, so wherever you turn your face there is the face of Allah"** (2:115). Nevertheless, as a sign of unity, Muslims are instructed to face the *qiblah* (the direction of the *Ka'bah* in Makkah) during prayer. Mosques also have minarets and domes from which the call to prayer is announced.

Before a person enters a mosque, his or her shoes must be removed, and women should be dressed conservatively (*hejab*). Neither men nor women should carry on loud conversations inside. Mosques belong to Allah, not to specific individuals, families, communities, or tribes. The Quran states, **"And the mosques are for Allah alone, so invoke not anyone along with Allah"** (72:18). Hence, barring people from conducting their worship in a mosque is considered a grave sin in Islam. The Quran states, **"And who is more unjust than those who forbid that Allah's name be glorified and mentioned much in Allah's mosques and strive for their ruin?"** (2:114).

~ EPILOGUE ~

There are other issues related to Islamic beliefs and rituals that I intentionally refrained from mentioning throughout this book. The reason being is that my primary focus was to be brief and comprehensible. However, the core of Islam, as the reader may have noticed, is four-dimensional. It includes the attitude and behavior of a Muslim toward him or herself, Allah the Almighty, the family and community, and the environment. Prophet Muhammad summarized the meaning of religion in a single word—*comportment*. Behavior and belief during one's lifetime will determine his or her fate on the Day of Judgment. With these words of conclusion, I hope and pray that Allah the Almighty may guide us all along the right path. It is only through His path that one is insured success, prosperity, and peace in this life and in the Hereafter, *insha'Allah*.



~ GLOSSARY ~

Adhaan—a call for prayer.
Adil—justice.
Al-Fatiha—The opening chapter of the Quran.
Al-Qiblah—Direction of Makkah.
Aslama—Surrendered.
Asr—Afternoon.
Bazrakh—The universe that separates death from the Day of Resurrection.
Bint—Daughter.
Fajr—Dawn.
Fitra—Natural disposition.
Hajj—Pilgrimage to Makkah.
Hijrah—Migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madina.
Ibn—Son.
Iddah—Waiting period for a woman after divorce.
Iqaama—The announcement of the beginning of the prayer.
Imama—Leadership after the Prophet.
Imam(s) —Successor(s) to the Prophet.
Ishaa—Night prayers.
Jabir—Compulsion.
Jeneba—State of sexual impurity.
Jihad—To strive.
Ka'bah—House of Allah in Makkah.
Khalifa—Vicegerent.
Khums—Religious taxes on wealth.
Magrib —Sunset.
Masjid—Mosque.

Mu'min—Believer.
Nubuwwa—Prophethood.
Qiblah—Direction to Makkah.
Rak'ah—Unit of prayers.
Sadaqa—Charity.
Salaat—Prayers.
Sawm—Fast.
Shura—Consulatation.
Sujud—Prostration.
Taahir—Clean.
Tafwid—Free will.
Tawaf—Circumambulation.
Tawhid—Monotheism.
Thuhr—Noon.
Wudhu—Ablution.
Zakat—Islamic tax.

OTHER ISLAMIC BOOKS WRITTEN BY SAYED MOUSTAFA AL-QAZWINI

Inquiries About Shia Islam—attempts to bridge the gap between the Islamic schools of thought by clarifying common misconceptions about Shi'a Islam and explaining philosophies and practices specific to the Shi'a school of thought. These issues are discussed primarily in the light of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet (*pbuh&hf*) as related in the books of hadith.

A New Perspective—A dialogue that discusses and expounds the various issues regarding the rights and laws that pertain to women in Islam, and unwraps some of the distorted images and misconceptions that surround Muslim women. Co-authored and discussed with a Muslim woman—*Fatma Saleh.*

